

BARBARA of the SNOWS



HARRY IRVING GREENE



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BARBARA OF THE SNOWS



"I Have Come Back to Tell You"

BARBARA OF THE SNOWS

By HARRY IRVING GREENE



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BARBARA OF THE SNOWS

CHAPTER I

WILSON STODDARD arose unsteadily from the round table and stood weaving slightly in his tracks as he confronted his companions. His face was pale, white save for the dark pouches that hung underneath his eyes, and his hand quivered like a wind-thrummed reed as he pointed one finger like a hostile pistol at Grayford who sat opposite him. And at Stoddard's ominous uprising the other three sitters at the table slid back in their seats and gripped their chair-arms with the watchful nervousness of men who half expect a sudden exchange of fierce blows in their midst; while the other loungers who happened to be near ceased their talk and eyed the table expectantly. Then Stoddard's voice shaken by anger and much strong drink broke the silence.

"Grayford, you lie and you know that you lie."

The thick neck of the one addressed swelled at the words and his skin took on a purplish hue. "By heavens, I'll not permit any man—" he began as his hand closed about the knob of his whip-like walking stick. But Stoddard's voice snapped the sentence in twain as scissors snap thread.

"You will permit anything I choose to say. To-day you shall listen to me in silence, as I have silently listened to you in the months past. And mind you what I say, Grayford, I'll tolerate no further attacks by you upon myself, be they made openly or through the ambush of repetition. You have said that I was a drunkard and I let it pass, for whether a man is drunk or not is largely a matter of personal opinion. You have sneered at me as a gambler and I did not resent it, though I have bet no more and no oftener than do half the members of this club. You have openly charged that I was a disgrace to this organization where none but gentlemen are supposed to enter, and I was silent. But

when you accuse me of trifling with the love of good women I say, Grayford, you lie."

An inarticulate sound came from Grayford's lips, a gurgling intake of his breath between set teeth as he arose to his feet with his stick gripped tightly. Whether he was about to strike the man before him or whether he merely sought to leave his presence in peace none who saw him get upon his feet felt sure, but Stoddard, suddenly snatching up the heavy match receiver that stood upon the little table in the nook, drew back his arm and hurled the missile violently at the arising man. Just above the eye it struck him and the onlookers saw a strip of white suddenly show on his forehead as the projectile cut the scalp and then, glancing, crashed in fragments against the opposite wall. Grayford threw up his hands with a gurgle and fell heavily backward.

From all sides arose exclamations of dismay as the dull thud of the falling body sounded in their ears; then they quickly gathered and bent over it—all save the one who had dealt the blow and who still stood white and heaving, with his

eyes fastened upon his fallen enemy. Blood was streaming from the cut upon the forehead and the body lay in a position that was not pleasant to look upon. Quickly they straightened him out to his full length and ministered to him as best they knew how, chafing his wrists with their palms and dashing water in his face; but he still remained limp and breathless, with his gray eyes wide open and staring uncannily into those of the one who had felled him. Then Price, who had dabbled in physic, opened the fallen man's shirt bosom and placed his ear above his heart. For a moment he listened intently and then arose with a gray face which he turned upon Stoddard.

"You have killed him," he said coldly.

The one accused swayed more violently, staggered and seemed about to fall as the other man had done; then his wandering hands found the rim of the table and he grew steadier. "No—no," he gasped in a voice that sounded as faint and hollow as though it had come from a man coopered up in a cask or deep in a well. "It can't be that. He is only stunned—knocked out, you know." He stepped forward and

looked close into the eyes of the prostrate one, while a great horror seemed to slowly freeze his vitals.

"Hold that man and telephone for a physician and the police," cried a voice from the rear. And at those words Stoddard, with the start of a wild animal that hears the sudden onrush of an enemy, straightened himself and stood tense and alert, all tremblings gone and the glitter of desperation in his eyes. The fierce first instinct of primordial man who found himself face to face with deadly danger arose surging within him; and like primordial man he stood before them watchful and threatening, conscious only that he would fight to the bitter end should they seek to lay hands upon him. And though they knew he was but the shell of his former self, the wild look in his eyes and the vivid remembrance of his past prowess awed them, and they made no move as he slowly backed away from them and towards the door. And having reached it and standing with one hand upon the knob, he for an instant stood facing those who for years had been his closest friends, now turned his most dangerous enemies; then turning the latch darted

down the flight of marble steps and plunged into the crowd of the street. At the first corner he turned to the right, and passing through a hotel lobby left it and entered another street; ran down an alley and emerging from that cast himself more slowly into the current of the great gulf-stream that swept solidly through the human sea of the city. With a hundred thousand human beings around him to screen his tall figure he adapted his stride to the pace of the stream as he drifted aimlessly onward with eyes staring straight ahead and brain whirling dizzily. And then with the realization that imminent danger was past, his steadiness vanished and the palsy of reaction took its place. His knees grew weak beneath him, his hands shook and he muttered as he walked, with the unintelligible utterances of one who tries to talk in his sleep, as his brain, befuddled again now that the excitement was past, clumsily began arranging the order of things which he must next do. Already the cringing guilt of the fugitive was upon him, and as a familiar face passed he dodged as if struck at and went by with averted eyes, when but an hour before he would have stopped and held out his hand.

A woman whom he had known nearly all his life smiled at him from the crowd, and his knees smote each other as he fumbled for his hat to return the salutation. Yet she was one of the few who had defended him valiantly through all, as she stoutly maintained that he was not lost, but only for the moment gone astray. From behind him he heard a voice that held the merciless sting of Grayford's, and he leaped aside at the sound and turned at bay in a nearby entrance until he realized that Grayford's voice was forever stilled. Then he leaned against the wall and covered his face with his hands, like a man who has gazed into the eyes of death from a yard's distance and would shut out what he saw there. When he looked up a minute later a dozen loiterers were staring at him with the insolent vulgarity of curbstone loafers, and he gathered himself together and passed rapidly on.

With every minute it came to him more insistently that he must get off these streets and into some private refuge. Thousands of people of whose very existence he had no knowledge, knew him by sight. Of all the famed athletes of the great university which lay beyond the city,

he in his day had been the most noted and the one who had oftenest brought it victory. Just ahead of him he saw the sign of a cheap hotel, and into the place he went and registered under a name which was not his own, after which he followed a bell-boy to the room allotted him. Locking the door he threw himself upon the bed.

Slowly his mind wandered along the crooked trail of the past. As though he lived it again he saw his boyhood life at home; the death of his parents; his inheritance of his father's fortune and his years at college when his name was a by-word for physical might and good fellowship—when all womankind smiled upon him and all men delighted to do him honor. Then when his books had been laid aside, the aimless drifting and occasional drinking bouts that had merged so imperceptibly into steady tippling and his sinking to the level of the rarely sober club lounge. Afterwards how, one by one, by pairs and by whole companies, his former friends had turned their backs upon him until only a score of the loyal remained—and they only because they must pardon his vice in the name of their own. Even in his club, where one could do al-

most as one willed, he had been daily ignored or almost openly insulted by innuendoes that he could not resent. And now realizing that he was only tolerated there by reason of the past, he had more than once written his resignation and sat fumbling it with nervous hands, only to finally tear it to shreds and arise with the fierce resolve that his manhood should triumph and that he would again stand with his shoulders squared among his friends. Yet month by month the old life had gone on until—the tears welled from his eyes and his fingers buried themselves like talons in the coverlet as his half wrecked nerves shook him from head to foot. The stimulus of the liquor that he had drunk earlier in the day had passed and he was as weak as a child; shaking and numb of brain when now of all times he should be alert and keen-witted. Arising he went to the telephone and ordered whisky, and when it came gulped it down eagerly. It steadied him instantly and swept the fog from his brain as a keen wind sweeps the mist from the sea. Once more he could reason logically.

He had killed a fellow man. It had been un-

wittingly done to be sure, and while he would have given all but his own life to have undone the deed, his act had been inexcusable under the law, and the law would cry aloud for vengeance. While at college he had read the criminal code and none knew the statutes bearing upon homicide better than he. Sternly they had said to him that he who shed the blood of his fellow man cold-bloodedly, premeditatedly and with a wicked and abandoned heart—that man had committed murder in the first degree and by man should his blood be shed. But he who killed not intending so to do, but in wrath and with a weapon of death and while not defending or believing that he defended his own life or body from grievous hurt—that man should be deemed guilty of murder in the second or lesser degree, and should be swallowed by dungeons until through death or long years of servitude he had paid the usurious debt of the law. Under the statutes his homicide had been clearly of the second sort. He had not intended to kill or even to seriously hurt; yet he had used a deadly weapon in wrath and when neither defending his own life or body from great harm or even believing

life or limbs were in great jeopardy. For an hour he sat by the window as he racked his brain for a single ray of hope; then as the afternoon wore thin and melted into evening, hope came in a wild thought. Upon the streets the newsboys were shouting their wares, and Stoddard leaping to his feet went bounding down the steps that led outside. Surely Grayford had been only stunned after all. An all-wise Providence having taught him an unforgettable lesson, had in its infinite mercy intervened and granted him one last chance for the redemption of soul and body. So convinced did he become that this must be so, and that his black despair of the last hour had been but a hideous nightmare, that his heart leaped strongly within him and he walked the street almost lightly. Eagerly he sought an evening's paper that its silence might confirm his hope.

An urchin howling incoherently almost ran between his legs, and Wilson clutched at him as he would have clutched at an eel. Dropping a coin into the dirty hand he snatched a paper from it and stepped into a nearby entrance. Slowly, as a condemned criminal might unfold

a writ which contained either his death warrant or his pardon, his heart beating tumultuously, his breath coming quick and sharp, he opened it and read. Then he lurched forward and crumpling the sheet between his fingers went staggering down the street with drawn face and eyes that were dulled by horror. The headlines had told him all. William Grayford, retired architect and prominent clubman, had been struck down and killed in his club by Wilson Stoddard, former college man and noted athlete, now a wealthy but convivial man-about-town, who had fled immediately upon the consummation of the murder. But already he had been seen upon the streets by several who knew him, and the police were unusually confident of his early capture—a confidence that seemed warranted by reason of his well-known habitats and wide circle of acquaintanceship. Mechanically Stoddard threw the paper aside and stood at the crossing until the first brunt of the shock was over.

He was a marked man. Not in this or in any city, town or hamlet of the civilized world could he long remain unknown. His swarms of

college mates had scattered as the winds had blown them, and besides them were the tens of thousands of trotters of the earth who had watched him, conspicuous by reason of his fame and powerful figure, in the great athletic events in the days when columns had been written about his most trivial acts. Yet this great city, his home, was manifestly the unsafest place of all. At first thought flight seemed cowardly even though it were not the act of a coward, and cowardice he had always despised as having no place within him. Only one road seemed to lie before him. In a sudden blaze of unreckoning anger he had slain a fellow being; and though guiltless of intent to kill, he had by that act forfeited his right to freedom and now must surrender himself and bear his punishment as best punishment could be borne. Knowing that the road before him ran straight to the prison gates, and that there could be no more in life for him than a felon's thoughts and a felon's end, he stepped unflinching upon it. With clenched teeth and eyes set he strode straight towards a policeman who stood at the opposite corner.

Half way there he became aware of an unusual

uproar in the street. Arising above the grind of wheels and the clank of iron shoes arose hoarse cries of "thief, thief," and "stop him," and Wilson glancing towards the spot from which the tumult arose saw a young man with a mottled face fighting desperately for freedom in the midst of a crowd. Hurrying on he reached the scene of the struggle just as two detectives fell upon the battling one, saw them twist his arms into helplessness and heard the sharp click of the handcuffs as they made him their captive and dragged him still struggling to a patrol box at a nearby corner. Stoddard, following with the throng, awaited the arrival of the police wagon and watched the victim thrown into it as though he had been a man of rags, hearing from within the sound of savage blows followed by a despairing cry for mercy; then turned away with a shudder. And this other criminal whom they were torturing because he, true to the first instinct of animal kind, clung desperately to liberty, was but a petty pickpocket whose crime was the stealing of a watch. If the law which he had been taught to revere as calm, as just, as merciful, treated an unconvicted miscreant so mercilessly in the very

hearing of all who cared to listen, what then would be the fate of a murderer once within the muffling walls of a dungeon? Was it best to surrender and be buried alive after all? Could not man make better atonement to the society that he had outraged and do vastly more for his own salvation by remaining free, doing a man's work and living the life that it had been intended he should live when the breath of life had been breathed into him? There seemed to be but one answer to the question as he put it to himself now. Nor was flight necessarily cowardly. He had not intended to kill, he had merely struck as a million other men had struck when driven to great anger, and the only difference between their blows and his had been the weight of an ounce or the variation of a hair. Yet they had lived and died unchallenged by law or conscience because of the difference of the ounce or hair, while he, no more guilty than they, must become a convict. Another road unrolled itself before him as his thoughts ran on, a road that led not to destruction but to life, to effort, to reparation, and turning his back upon the blue-coated giant of the crossing he went swiftly away.

He entered a lesser street which had been abandoned to the under-world, where Chinese restaurants and cheap clothing stores flying three gilded balls were upon every side, and entered one of the latter places. From the counter he selected a rough, ill-fitting suit of workingman's clothes worth a dozen dollars at the most, and in exchange for them and a handful of silver gave his own apparel which had cost a full hundred. At the doorway in passing out he nearly collided with a care-faced young woman and drew aside with a brief sentence of apology. She looked at him with the dull, uncomprehending stare of one who totally fails to understand the meaning of familiar words grouped into an unfamiliar formula, while Stoddard, dropping his eyes to the bundles she carried, saw that it was a soiled satin dress, festooned with cheap lace and wrapped about by a flowing veil—her wedding finery beyond almost the shadow of a doubt. The silver was still clutched in his hand, and acting upon the impulse of the moment he dropped it upon the dress and brushed by her into the street. She did not call after him to thank him, she uttered no word of recognition of his charity and

he did not look around to see the result of his hasty almsgiving. Money was the least of his troubles. A quarter of a million well invested stood in his own name and right, and with the hope that the handful of silver might spare her a heartache he thought of her no more.

At another store he bought coarse underclothing and other wearing apparel, cap and boots, a cheap "telescope" in which to carry them, and a pair of spectacles. At a barber shop he had his hair clipped until nothing remained but an outcropping of bristles, but his face he ordered left untouched by the razor. His beard was naturally of quick and heavy growth, and he knew that a week's neglect of it would disfigure him almost beyond recognition. Next he took a car and sought a workingmen's hotel hard by a great depot from which trunk lines radiated like the meshes of a spider's web, and as nine o'clock boomed from the depot belfry he crept into bed exhausted of mind and body, but cold sober upon retiring for the first time in a year. An hour later he was sleeping, but it was with fitful tossings and mutterings at the grotesques that haunted the land wherein his mind wandered.

When morning came he drew on his rough clothes and proceeded down stairs. His face was haggard despite his rest, and his hands shook like the hands of one who walks near the end of life instead of near its beginning. The craving for his morning's drink tortured him keen as the water thirst of a man whose body is a furnace from fever, but he passed the obtrusive bar without a glance in its direction and hastened to a restaurant where he drank several cups of black coffee. This warmed and stimulated him somewhat and in a measure relieved the cravings of his stomach. After that he began to formulate carefully his plans for the future. Obviously his first step towards continued liberty must be to leave the city far behind him and with that object in mind he secured a time-table and railroad map and studied them with great attention to detail. From the time-table he learned that the Winnipeg Express would leave the station in about an hour, but Stoddard feeling certain that all departing trains would be carefully watched by detectives dared not venture the boarding of a car by the common avenues of the public. Remembering, however, that the

Winnipeg train made a brief stop at a crossing about a mile down the yards, he procured his telescope and proceeded carelessly among the labyrinth of tracks to the point which he had in mind, swung himself aboard the smoker as the train came to a halt, and at the first suburban station hurried from the train and purchased a ticket to the Canadian city of the far north. When night came twelve hours later he was well among the pine woods. Riding but a few stations further, he slipped quickly from the wrong side of the train at a small lumbering town out of which a logging spur of the main railroad ran into the heart of the pineries. In the city which he had left behind him that morning the air had been soft and the pavements warm under the sun, but here a light snow covered the ground and the breath of the north made him button his coat as he passed along the rickety sidewalks of the shanty town with his glance wandering at random in search of a place of lodging. Noisy saloons and smoke-filled dance halls crowded with uncouth lumber jacks upon their last carouse before facing the deep snows and bitter cold of the mighty woods were about him on

every side. Gambling dens with doors flung wide invited him within, and tawdry women were at his elbow nearly constantly. But while he passed all these with small notice, their existence in this place met with his approval, he regarding them as safeguards thrown about him. For of all haunts in which to search for the immaculate, the critical and the luxury-loving, the last would be in the squalid atmosphere of a backwoods logging town where the food was as coarse as the tan bark upon the streets, the liquor an abomination to the palate and a decently made suit of clothes an object of derision.

Passing on to a portion of the town that seemed either a trifle less disreputable or a trifle more discreet than the other, he found a dingy hotel bearing the title of "Lumbermen's Rest"; and registered there with an illegible scrawl, after which he ate a little of what was brought to him and then retired to his box-like room deep in thought. Why not make this place his headquarters as well as some point further on? Repellant though his surroundings were, no place could be more obscure or more unlikely as his habitat. Here he could ostensibly, at least, en-

gage in some occupation that would serve to avert suspicion until he had gained sufficient time to perfect his plans for the new and better life that was to be his in the time to come. He favored the idea, but being clothed in the garb of a city mechanic, his next step must be to again discard his wardrobe in favor of the prevailing fashion of the place, that he might be less conspicuous and more quickly identify himself as part and parcel of the people about him. This he determined to do as his first act in the morning. After that he would make a search for some small business which he could purchase as an occupation until it became safer for him to leave for some remote land. Once abroad and his trail grown cold, hidden beneath another name and a whiskers-covered face, he could enlarge his scope and pursue the plan that was forming vaguely in his brain. A thousand or two dollars invested here—a sudden chill swept him and hastily drawing all his money from his pockets he counted it into a little pile on the bed. It amounted to less than twenty-five dollars. For a second time black despair settled upon him as with staring eyes he gazed upon the few small

bills and scattered pieces of silver that lay upon the cloth. For with a hundred thousand dollars in gilt-edge bonds, with more than that amount in mortgages and interest-bearing notes, with ten thousand dollars cash in bank, he was practically a pauper. His quarter of a million was as useless to him as though he were already in a prison cell; as inaccessible as though buried upon a star. Not a dollar could he draw from the bank, not a mortgage could he release or foreclose, not a note could he collect or discount without affixing his signature to check, release, receipt or power of attorney. Nor could he receive a penny unless he appeared in person or by an agent duly authorized, who in turn must know his whereabouts in order that he might remit the proceeds to him. And to trust any man with the secret of his hiding place was not to be thought of, even though one could be found who would consent to give assistance and encouragement to a fleeing murderer. He was an outlaw among men with every man's hand raised against him—he whose careless good nature had been almost a proverb among those who knew him—whose heart had ever been the friendliest and

most generous towards mankind, and whose only fault had been a weakness and whose only sin an accident.

Almost penniless despite his fortune and having mastered neither trade nor profession which he might now invoke to earn his daily bread, Stoddard sank limply into a chair and closed his eyes in a great weariness of soul and brain. He slept none that night. Repentance, remorse and vain regrets rode him with bit and spur.

CHAPTER II

HE breakfasted from dishes which he scarcely glanced at, and had the food which he ate been sawdust from the streets it is to be doubted if he would have taken note of it. His head ached with dull monotony, and he gladly left the table in the hope that the crisp air of the morning might bring him some relief. More snow had fallen during the night, and the wind nipped him with a sharp tooth as he walked briskly from street to street of the town. The river was filled with logs moored in rafts, over which rivermen in sharp corked boots leaped or galloped as they herded the logs to the pull-ups of the sawmills. The whine and snarl of many circular saws came to his ears, and the damp aroma of new sawdust filled his nose. He must seek employment at once either among those buzzing teeth or in the town, even though the wages earned would but bring him board and lodgings, and turning from the river he scanned the scattered business places

critically as he took mental inventory of their character. At the end of a five minutes' walk along the main street he struck his balance. Two sawmills, two planing mills, twelve saloons, three dance halls and gambling rooms, two general merchandise and lumbermen's outfitting stores, four alleged hotels and barn-like boarding places, a blacksmith's shop and a logging company's office comprised the business interests of the settlement. It would have been hard to find a place less promising for a search such as Stoddard was bent upon, but in the precariousness of his finances he must exhaust the possibilities of the town before squandering precious money upon railroad fare that his search might be continued in other places. He had never been face to face with actual want before. Many thousand dollars had always intervened between him and the necessities of life, and like a tyro who suddenly finds himself confronted by a grim enemy, his lack of self confidence caused him much apprehension where a more experienced warrior would have smiled and counted the odds all his own. Clerking, driving a team or doing porter work seemed to be his best hope, and he

decided that the general stores should be the first objects of his attack. Drawing a long breath he entered the larger of the two and stood at the counter as he waited for an opportunity to speak to one of the employés.

The door opened and a man came in carrying a traveling case in either hand which he deposited upon the counter, then leaned carelessly against a show case and began to whistle. Stoddard glancing at him from the corner of his eyes dropped his face and stood with the blood surging to his temples and his heart thumping wildly. Billy Barton of all men! Stoddard had not seen him since leaving college four years before; good-natured, talkative, irresponsible Billy, who could tell more funny stories in a given time than any man in his class, but who had failed so dismally in his examinations that it would have been pathetic had not Billy himself made the funniest story of all about it. And here he was up in this forsaken neck of the woods selling cheap tobacco to the country trade,—Billy, who had professed an affinity to the celestial bodies and whose ambition had been to become a great astronomer. “Quite a tumble from the stars of space to

‘Star’ plug tobacco,” thought Wilson, half pitying his college mate until he remembered how immeasurably greater had been his own downfall. Then sympathy for the other departed. Billy at all events was making a decent living; Billy could joke his way through the world not caring who heard him laugh while he—Stoddard turned his back and slunk away from the presence of his old friend like a hunted creature.

But the escape had been a narrow one and the cold perspiration still oozed from his forehead as he hurried away with quick steps of fear and Billy’s eyes seeming to bore twin holes through his back. Of course Billy had read of the Grayford affair in the papers, and had he looked fairly at his college friend of old the chances would have been all in favor of a recognition. And though Billy would have promised Wilson anything upon earth, the latter knew one might as well hope to dry Niagara with a blotter as to dam Billy’s mouth once he was out of sight. But the experience had been worth the scare. Obviously he could not remain in any town however remote; at least until a well-grown beard and mustache screened his face. And it would

be a matter of many weeks before that time came. He turned until his eyes looked into the distance where low hills were buried beneath a forest that stretched unbroken to the great fresh water sea of the north. In the heart of that almost primeval wilderness lay safety for him if there was safety upon earth, and into its heart he must go with a dauntless will and an earnest arm. Only the rugged, the tireless and the endlessly patient could endure the toil and hardships that were the lot of those men of brawn who wrung their pittance from that snow-bound wilderness. But Stoddard knew that once well broken in, strength and tirelessness would be his once more, while endless patience must come to him who cannot be otherwise than endlessly patient. Into those soundless woods, therefore, he would go and side by side with the carousing ones who had surrounded him the night before learn to the ultimate the bitter lesson of the transgressor.

At the "Lumbermen's Rest" he made guarded inquiries and learned that John Findlay, then sitting in the little recruiting office across the way, was hiring men for the woods,

and to that man he went without loss of time. Findlay, gray of temples, lean and muscular, listened to his plaint as he might have listened to a parrot. And fearing that he was about to be summarily rejected at the close of his speech, Wilson lengthened it with an earnestness that compounded with each sentence uttered. Then when he felt that to say more would be to weaken his cause, he ceased talking as he mutely awaited the other's decision. But instead of dismissing the applicant with a word, as the indifferent listening had boded, the logger now sat searching the younger man with eyes behind which lay as keen a judgment as to the intrinsic value of man or horse as could be found in all the diamond minds of the pineries. But while Findlay was known as one of the best men in the woods to work under, he was accustomed to dealing with bare-knuckled men and handling them accordingly. To the one before him now he made no exception.

"You want to work in the woods? What can you do when you get there—besides eat?"

In the very nature of things Stoddard had known that this would be one of the first ques-

tions asked him, and his reply lay upon the tip of his tongue. "Any unskilled labor. I am pretty strong."

The other man grunted, noting the pale face and white though powerful hands. "Strength is a drug in the market—unless there is science back of it. If strength was all I wanted I would buy elephants. Ever work in the woods?"

"No."

The logger's forehead corrugated. "Then what the hell good do you imagine you would be to me?" Stoddard, who had not been addressed with words and tones like these since he had passed from beneath the tyranny of the college coach four years before, and who had even then resented it, tasted his gorge as it arose. Then realizing that he was no longer a man who could resent discourtesies, but was rather a well-nigh penniless outcast who must bow to whomsoever might choose to offer him a meal, whatever the meal might consist of, he bit his lip and took his first lesson in endless patience.

"I don't know. Not much I guess. But I can do hard labor and I believe that I would

learn rather quickly. I need work badly and am willing to begin at any living wages."

"Can you do camp chores?"

"I don't know. What are they?"

Findlay's mouth expanded and then froze in a crack-like smile. "Well, you get up at four in the morning, build the fires, roust the men from their blankets, chop the cook's wood, carry it in, bring the water, sweep the camp, shovel snow, fill the lanterns, carry lunch, make the office bunks, attend to odd jobs that come up, and the rest of the time you don't have to do a blessed thing but work. It's the only soft job I've got left. Can you build half a dozen fires in as many minutes?"

"I don't know that either. I never tried."

"Then you are like the man who didn't know whether he could play second violin because he had never played the first one. Of course you can't. Handle an ax?"

"Never had one in my hands."

The logger sniffed. "Well, I suppose you could learn to swamp. 'Most any fool can. But you won't be worth the salt pork you will

stuff yourself with for the first thirty days. However, I suppose someone has got to break you in and I might as well be the martyr. I'll give you twenty dollars the first month, and after that if you can do half a man's work I'll give you regular wages—ten dollars more. If you can't, I'll give you your time. Understand?"

"Yes," replied the applicant, and Findlay picking up his pen scribbled a few words on a card which he handed to his new employé. "Take this to Jim Flint, my walking boss. He is at Camp 5. He'll start you to work and see that you keep at it, too. Better outfit at our store at Archer for we might as well get your money as these storekeepers here. You can get directions as to where the camp is when you outfit. Your train leaves in ten minutes, and it is going to move just the same whether you happen to be aboard or not. Shut the door behind you when you go out."

With a brief sentence of thanks Wilson left the office far less depressed than when he had entered it. Regarding his new work he had not the slightest idea of what it would consist

other than severity, but at least it would be a man's work and would clothe him and give him food and a bed. Towards Findlay he felt genuinely grateful despite the other's brusqueness, being convinced that the logger's manner was more than half assumed, and his common sense told him that he had been employed more as a matter of charity than for his actual present worth. In spite of the humiliation of it he smiled grimly at the thought that he, Wilson Stoddard, college graduate and quarter of a millionaire was not intrinsically worth twenty dollars a month and his board. But he soon would be, or know the reason why, and when that time came he would see to it that John Findlay did not regret his generosity. Such were his thoughts as with the lumberman's last words in mind he hurriedly secured his telescope and ran for the depot.

He entered the rear car of the accommodation train that was to take him over the spur line to Archer and glanced over the interior. The "coach" was a disreputable, half worn-out box car which had been discarded as not good enough for live stock, and which had, therefore, been

dedicated to the American traveling public at four cents a mile. Half a dozen small windows scarcely larger than peek holes had been cut in the sides and fitted with immovable frames, and a score of board seats now polished to smoothness—not by hands—afforded the seating facilities. Upon these sat three or four women of the woods, thin, wiry and poorly dressed, one nursing a child that ceased drinking but to squall, and ceased to squall only that it might drink. Stoddard passing through the wretched vehicle took his seat in the next car forward which had been consecrated to the users of tobacco. It was the counterpart of the passenger coach, the only difference being in the inexpressible volume of its nicotine filth. The air was thick as porridge from the foul odor of tobacco smoke dead and alive, while from nearly every seat ran brown rivulets that sluggishly merged with the main channel of the stream that pursued its way through the center of the main aisle. A dozen woodsmen of half that many different nationalities were lolling in uncouth attitudes upon the seats, talking boisterously to the almost incessant gurgle of a jointly owned stone jug. To

Wilson's immaculate physical instincts the place was revolting in the extreme, and for an instant he hesitated upon the verge of retreat to the cleaner car behind. But a squall muffled by distance decided him, and with the resolution to accustom himself as speedily as possible to these men who were to be physically closer to him than brothers, he swallowed his disgust and selecting the least objectionable vacant seat threw himself upon it. With a blow that hurled the inmates of the train against the seats in front of them, the backing engine smote the front end of the car and coupled to it. Then with bronco leaps and spasmodic buckings it jerked the train intermittently into the north.

To Stoddard the three ensuing hours were among the most wearisome of his life. At every station more lumbermen boarded the train, and with each batch of new arrivals the smoke cloud grew more intolerable, the air more humid and unbreathable and the brown channel of the aisle more fathomless. The conductor navigated it stoically. "Looks like the Copperas at flood," he said naively as he gathered the fares. The Copperas was a licorice river that ran through

the mineral belt and the comparison was not inapt. The oaths that were born with the passing miles were beyond repetition and in some cases almost beyond belief, while the intervals between them were interspersed with scufflings as gentle as the frolics of steers. Across the aisle from Stoddard a friendly pair twisted each other's arms until the muscles cracked as they tested their respective grips. Behind him a huge Canadian sat upon a lesser companion's head, singing uproariously to drown the cries of the one beneath as he beat him with an empty flask in accompaniment to his song. Before him lounged a burly fellow with one end of a taut rubber band between his teeth and the other between his fingers; strumming upon it by the hour as vacuous of thought as a puppy chewing a stick—the mind of a child in the body of a Hercules. To Stoddard's relief they ignored his presence absolutely; yet it was with satisfaction that at the end of the third hour he stepped from the train at Archer and cast his first glance over the hamlet. Before him stood the company store and office, a sawmill, two long log buildings where the mill employés ate and slept, a private

log cottage or two, a stable and nothing more, while close about it hovered the green ranks of the unbroken forest. Picking up his telescope the traveler entered the little store.

A young woman about twenty years of age stood behind the counter, and as Wilson first saw her he made an involuntary movement as if about to pause, then continued his advance with much the same sensations as though he had, in tramping through the brush and deadfalls of this sombre woodland, suddenly chanced upon a flower of exquisite loveliness and fragrance full-blown amidst the snows. Composite beauty was hers, combining the fair soft skin of the northern races with the dark masses of wavy hair and unfathomable eyes of a beauty of the far south. Yet Barbara Findlay, despite the blended types, was as purely American as himself, who traced his Yankee ancestors back through the mists of five generations. Of medium height and more slenderly made than otherwise, yet without the slightest suggestion of thinness, she looked at him with the quiet poise of a well-bred woman of the cities as he dropped his luggage and faced her from across the narrow counter. She did not

ask him what he wished as a saleswoman would have done, and Stoddard after a minute's pause to ascertain if she was the one who was to wait upon him, finding her still silent, addressed her.

"I wish to get a lumberman's outfit. Perhaps you can tell me if this is the right place," he said, and paused. She swept him up and down with a quick glance that contained perhaps a bit of surprise at hearing a voice so well modulated coming from one who dressed as a laborer, then averted her face slightly as she answered him.

"Mr. Ford, the storekeeper, will be back in a moment and will wait upon you. I am waiting for him also." Stoddard, retired a pace and half seating himself upon the head of a barrel, could now note her profile unobserved. It was regular, yet softened by rounded lips, and was possessed of a chin that bespoke courage and determination to the full; yet without even the hint of obstinacy. And stamped upon each outline was the imprint of a pride that one might easily offend, combined with a self reliance that would hesitate long before asking favors—all

modified again by an almost imperceptible upturn of the corners of the mouth as if a smile slept so lightly there that it needed but a trifling thing to awaken it into a laugh. So much he observed before Ford entered with loud stampings to free his feet of the snow and demanded what he wished.

"Everything that I will need during a winter in the woods from cap to boots," was the reply, and one by one the storekeeper dragged the articles forth from box and shelf and spread them upon the counter. Three suits of the heaviest, warmest, mixed woolen underwear; half a dozen pairs of socks as thick as a thin board; stout trousers that reached below the knees but fell short of the tops of laced waterproof boots; rubbers of pure gum; checkered flannel shirts and mackinaw; woodsman's cap and woodsman's mittens—all confronted him upon the counter in a bulky pile. The girl disinterestedly watched proceedings from the top of the tall office stool where she had climbed as though seeking safety from the deluge of the shelves.

Wilson paid his bill and rattled what was left of his fortune in the corner of his pocket. It

amounted to less than a dollar, but there would be no necessity, barring the unforeseeable, for him to spend money during the long winter now close at hand. And at the end of five months' work and saving he should be able to emerge from the woods with nearly one hundred and fifty dollars in his pocket—a sum just about equivalent to what he had been accustomed to spend weekly in times gone by. A few days back the thought of facing a prospect as drear as this would have been almost unbearable, but with the inevitable before him Stoddard thrice blessed his lucky stars that work which would bring him an honest livelihood awaited his untrained hands. One thought of Grayford and all self-commiseration instantly vanished. Buried in reflections such as these he stood motionless by the stove, his eyes fastened upon the window, past which great snowflakes were eddying like down plucked from beneath the wings of a waterfowl.

The girl slipped easily from her perch upon the stool to gather up two bulky packages of groceries which the clerk had just finished wrapping up for her, and taking one in each hand

she left the store with a farewell nod to Ford but without having glanced at Stoddard since the completion of his purchases. Aroused from his revery by her brisk departure he looked after her through the pane. A hill, steep and heavily blanketed with snow arose before her, accessible only by an almost untrampled trail that led to a well-built log cottage near the summit. Stoddard, idly watching her break her way through snow that came half way to her knees, saw her trip upon her skirt, and losing her balance by reason of her unwieldy packages, sit down upon one of them with much suddenness. The distance was short between her and the store, and as she scrambled to her feet and looked at the paper sack upon which she had sat, the ruefulness of her face forced a smile to the lips of the watcher. Plainly she was in mild distress, and without the slightest hesitation he opened the door, passed quickly to her side and picked up the bag that had been beneath her. A thick white and yellowish ooze was straining from the bottom of it, and at this sight of the wreckage she had caused the girl's frown vanished and her laugh awoke; the laugh that had

seemed to sleep so lightly on her lips and which the man had thought he would like to hear.

"I shall never sit on eggs again. I am not a success," she said. "And only think! They are forty cents a dozen."

He shook his head gravely, duly impressed with the seriousness of the situation as with a handful of snow he sought to stay the sticky flow and cleanse the bottom of the bag, while she, shaking her skirts and gathering them about her shoe tops prepared to continue the ascent. Stoddard peered cautiously into the bag. "Twenty cents gone—there are only six left. Shall I run back to the store and get you another nestful?" She looked at him with a faint smile.

"No. I am alone to-night and I think half a dozen should be sufficient. You see the other six were for daddy whom I expected to come to-day, but who disappointed me." She held out her hand for the package, but Stoddard, stepping past her, had secured the other burden from the snow before she realized his intentions and was going double laden up the hill.

"You will have your hands full in attending

to your skirts. Step in my tracks—plenty of room in them,” he advised over his shoulder. Finding herself being left behind she did as he had suggested, yet not without protesting to his broad back that she neither wished nor needed assistance. But he plowed steadily on without heeding her in the least, dragging his feet and clearing the way as best he could until they stood together upon the veranda at the door. Her cheeks were flushed from the sharp climb, her lips slightly parted and between their red rims he caught a glimpse of the tips of white teeth back of them. She opened the cottage door and his glance rested momentarily upon a corner of the interior. The floor was of polished pine almost as white as the snow without, and beneath a broad mantle upon which reposed bric-a-brac cunningly made from fungus and birch bark a fireplace was ablaze with snapping logs. Before it a huge rocking chair made from fantastically twisted natural wood stood upon a magnificent wolf skin, and above it were crossed snowshoes and the perfect antlers of a buck with a gun hung across them. Stoddard, observing these things in the flash of an eye, thought that he had

never seen a corner more inviting and reposeful than this nook in the great logs and would gladly have seen more of it; but the girl stepping upon the sill held out her hands for the packages and he gave them to her with a small bow and the suggestion of a smile.

"I thank you very much. It was thoughtful of you to break the way for me," she said with evident sincerity back of the lightness of her tone and manner. He removed his cap and stepped back and their eyes fairly met once more for a fleeting instant. Then the door closed and he went hurrying down the trail. Back at the store he beat the snow from his feet and going to the small scarred mirror that hung against the wall looked into it. A spectacled, close-clipped, bristle-bearded operatic villain stared at him from the glass like the caricature of a well-known face, scarcely recognizable in its metamorphosis. Even his tall, well-built figure was smothered in the flapping folds of the ill-fitting garments, and he scowled back at the now scowling villain of the mirror with deep disfavor. His purpose had been to make himself look as unlike himself as possible, and that he had succeeded

so well should have been a matter of self-congratulation; yet he could not help but wish that she had seen him as he had been a year before. With a sigh of regret he turned to his purchases and began straightening them out preparatory to getting into them, telling himself that his looks were even comelier than he would have had them. For were he as hideous as a gargoyle, the face of a totem pole or a Burmese god, why not all the better?

What mattered it?

CHAPTER III

HE changed the workingman's suit for his woodsman's garb and felt the better for it. It fitted him somewhat closely, yet gave him plenty of freedom of movement and harmonized far better with his surroundings than had the garments just discarded. And although he was practically unconscious of the fact, it became him immensely. He was tall and erect, and though somewhat wasted from late hours and lack of muscle-building nourishment, the natural color of health had already begun to return to his face and his eyeballs were clear white once more. With each deep breath from the pines he felt the returning surge of his old strength, and the bare thought of the life he had so long lived filled him with a loathing inexpressible. But he knew that while the great battle against his enemy had been won for all time, there would be skirmishes still to be fought. The shock of that hideous day was still upon him with almost

sickening force, but in the months to come there would be many a night when he would lie sleepless through the long hours and when the temptation would come to him to arise, and for the time being at least, seek forgetfulness in the embrace of a foe that lulls as it destroys. He had no fear that he would yield, yet his guard must be ever up and his front the sternest and most uncompromising.

He left his cast-off clothing and telescope in the care of the storekeeper, swung his blanket roll across his back, and securing minute directions as to the location of Camp 5, eight miles distant, set out for it. The big eddying flakes had blurred the trail, and he trod its dim outlines with the alertness and caution of one who for the first time finds himself dependent upon his own resources amidst unfamiliar surroundings. Pine, tamarack, cedar, hemlock, birch, fir and hardwoods hemmed him about, silently mysterious, seeming to close in behind and before him in a solid wall yet parting narrowly to let him pass as he strode against them along the shallow trough of the winding trail. Save for the soft crunch of his feet in the snow the

silence was absolute; save for himself it was a lifeless solitude, vast, depressing, bearing down upon him like a great soft weight as though he were being smothered by tons of feathers. Never before had he felt such inexpressible homesickness; never before such a hunger for the companionship and sympathy of some one who could understand. Yet he well knew he was only upon the threshold of an existence which must ever be in lonely places and among those whom he could never call heart comrades even though one blanket might cover both. Grimly he fought away the almost maddening soul sickness and trudged stolidly on.

For three hours he scrambled up ridges and wound his way among gloomy cypress swamps, then from the top of a hill looked down through the gathering dusk upon a camp in the clearing below. It was a new sight to his eyes and he paused to survey the structures. All were of ponderous logs, squat and formidable looking, the longest building being disjoined in the middle by a roofed-over passageway. This structure he correctly guessed was used one half as a bunkhouse for the men and the remaining portion as

the eating room and kitchen. Gathered about this central building and separated from it by varying distances were the stables, a small "office," and a blacksmith shop, all built in the same manner, all low and uncouth. Descending the hill he went straight to the office, threw the door open and inquired for the walking boss as he dropped his pack to the floor.

A tall, sinewy man arose from a bench saying that his name was Flint and demanding the newcomer's business, and Stoddard as his reply handed him the card upon which Findlay had scribbled the hieroglyphics. Quickly the walking boss read the lines and turned from them to the one who had brought them. "So you are a green road monkey, are you?" he demanded with a woodsman's disrespect for all tenderfeet. Stoddard, not quite certain whether he was or not, nevertheless assented.

"Rank greenhorn?" Again the applicant acquiesced silently.

"What's your name?"

"Wilson."

Flint threw down the card. "Then, Wilson, jog along behind me with your pack. Just like

the old man to begin shoving tenderfeet on me when good men are begging for jobs," he grumbled. Rapidly he led his charge to the men's quarters in the bunkhouse and threw the door wide. The interior was about fifty feet long by half as wide, flanked by a double row of wooden, box-like bunks in front of which ran the long benches or "deacon seats" of all camps. A huge heater stood in the center of the place, from which ran stout cords to the bunks and over which were thrown the unused clothing of the absent inmates. The air of the room was humid and strong with the smell of drying garments and stale tobacco smoke. Flint turned upon his follower.

"That is your bunk next to the door. Throw your pack on it. It is too late to do anything to-night, but don't be afraid that I won't start you early enough in the morning. And I'll make you a wager that to-morrow night you'll be the tireddest bluejay that Findlay ever sent me to turn into a woodpecker. So get a good night's sleep and to the devil with you." He slammed the door and stalked back to the office, and Wilson seating himself upon a bench awaited

whatever might befall him with the dull indifference of helplessness.

The gloom without thickened and the lights from the cook's shanty flickered pale across the snow. From out of the woods came scattered groups of snowy men, axes, saws and cant-hooks upon their shoulders, closely followed by heavy horses dragging log chains that clanked behind their heels. Boisterously the men entered the room with stampings and soundings, slaps of their mittens against their thighs, and then having thrown caps and hand coverings aside they soused their faces noisily in the water of the corner sink. From the passageway the cook's horn sounded its sharp command, and rapidly the men passed into the adjoining building and ranged themselves on long benches that ran beside the oilcloth-covered tables. Wilson following them took his place before the last unoccupied tin plate and ran his eyes over tables and room. Seventy men were already working with the energy of stokers as they shoveled huge quantities of food from the plates. For an instant aversion was strong upon him as he witnessed the ferocious assault of the hungry scores upon the hillocks

of food that confronted them, and had he not known that three times a day he must find himself where he now sat he would have made but faint pretense of eating. But looking at the tables again and more critically, much of his repugnance vanished. The steaming pots and pans gave forth the odor of wholesome food well cooked, the floor and table oilcloth were clean, and the cook pacing up and down the aisle with a huge iron ladle over his shoulder was neatly aproned and not at all repellent. And knowing that he must strongly fortify his physical being against the cold and work of the morrow, Wilson made a quick inventory of what was before him.

Skirmishing rows of tea and coffee with condensed milk close at hand and sugar and molasses backing them. Advance guards of hash, boiled rice, thickly sliced bread and hillocks of pallid butterine. Solid ranks of sausage, fresh raw pork cut in slabs, stewed venison and mashed potatoes supported by flanking forces of pies, cookies, doughnuts and puddings—all within reach of hand or spearing distance of fork,—and a shallow tin plate and a cup before each man from which to eat of it all. Tentatively he

filled his plate from the most attractive looking of the dishes in the common pile, a little sausage, a piece of venison, bread, butterine, pie and tea, and began to eat. The sausage was strong and unpleasant to the taste, the venison as good as he had ever tasted in the high priced chop houses of the cities, the bread heavy but wholesome and much more palatable without the strenuous butterine. The pie, to his agreeable surprise, was excellent and the tea both hot and weak. Much encouraged by the result of his samplings, he was just beginning to feed with a heartiness that the moment before he would not have believed possible when the man across the table from him dropped knife and fork and with a swift movement of his sleeve across his face swung his feet over the bench, arose and left the room. A dozen others were upon his heels before the door had swung behind him, and at the expiration of another minute the tables were deserted save for Wilson who sat in lone astonishment amidst the debris of the vanquished meal. Already the cook and cookee were falling upon the empty plates and bearing them away in huge dishpans as they darted quick glances of disapproval at

the new man who had scarcely a dozen mouthfuls to his stomach's credit. But one exchange of words had taken place among the seventy feeders during the progress of the meal and that had occurred in the twinkling of an eye. A man at the table next to Wilson had asked the one at his elbow to pass him the meat and potatoes. Like a shot the answer had come:

"Never mind the meat and potatoes. Shut your mouth and go on with your eating."

Realizing that he was violating camp etiquette by the slowness of his dining and hoping to appease the cook's evident impatience by a conciliatory sentence the lone eater uttered it, couching the phrase in the words of an explanatory apology. With the whirl of a dervish the autocrat of the kitchen spun upon him.

"What do you think this is—a—conversational parlor?" he roared. "Don't you suppose that I and this jabbering Canuck cookee have enough to do between four o'clock in the morning and nine at night to cook forty kinds of grub four times a day for seventy pot-bellied cannibals without waiting for them to chew the rag at the table instead of chewing the grub?"

Eat and get out of here as quick as the Lord will let you and give me them table tools." The cyclonic rush of the cook's words swept Wilson's voice away, and for the first time realizing the enormity of the other's daily duties he bolted a few more mouthfuls, gulped down his tea and left the shanty for the deacon bench among his fellows in the bunkhouse.

They looked at him with mingled curiosity and distrust, seeming to endeavor to sniff his atmosphere as beasts do the atmosphere of unfamiliar beasts, then studiously ignored him. Gradually the conversation resumed its wonted swing, of the day's cut, the hang of axes, the best drag teeth of saws and the multitudinous small incidents of the day, until as nine o'clock came they slipped out of their outer garments and crawled beneath the blankets. Wilson quickly followed suit, and wearied by his long day and tramp through the snow was soon wrapped in sound slumber.

Darkness thick as midnight still enveloped the camp when the chore boy thrusting his head within the door of the bunkhouse voiced his long morning call. Befuddled with sleep Wilson sat

upright in his bunk and watched his companions as they climbed into their clothes, wondering drowsily what meant this commotion in the midst of the darkness. The yellow rays of the night lamp fell upon an alarm clock and he saw that the hands pointed to half past four. Then realizing that this was the beginning of the day's labor he dropped to the floor and dressed with a rush as the cold night air set his teeth to chattering. And profiting by his experience of the previous night he managed through the ignoring of mastication to half fill his stomach with solids and steaming coffee before the tables were deserted by the lightning-jawed feeders about him. Then going without the building he stomped up and down to stir his blood to faster coursings as he watched the men and horses vanish into the black woods. Fifteen minutes later Flint approached him with a double-bladed ax swung across his broad shoulder.

"Here's your tool. Come along with me," he commanded as he strode by. Glad that activities were about to begin Wilson followed his leader into the woods and along a roughly broken tote road. From about him rising

sharply in the still air he heard the whine of saws, the clank of dragging chains and the cries of teamsters as they urged their straining horses to still greater efforts. From somewhere close at hand arose a quick warning shout that pierced the air like a vocal dagger, followed by the tremendous creaking and groaning of stout fibers torn apart. Then close upon the creaking came the roar of a great tree as it thundered through the boughs of its lesser companions, stripping and felling them as by a thunderbolt. Out of the lessening gloom across the road two horses came, tugging behind them a low pair of runners upon which was chained one end of a log, the other end dragging in the snow. The walking boss paused to point at it.

“That is what we call skidding. When a tree is felled it is sawed into different lengths, depending on how many logs we can get out of the trunk without waste. Then it is trimmed free of limbs and hauled on the skids to its proper pile for loading on sleds or being driven down the river when the break-up comes. A skidding crew is made up of two horses, a teamster, a log chainer, two sawyers and a swam-

per or road monkey. We have six skidding crews in this camp and you are the road monkey of number four. Now remember that and come on while you are remembering it."

They descended a hill and entered a swamp where the drifted snow lay thigh deep away from the trail. Working like beavers amongst the cedars were two great bearded Norwegians, and Flint jerking a hurried order over his shoulder for his follower to remain where he was, broke his way to the side of the pair and ran his eyes over the cut of the day before with quick measuring of butts and tops and sharp criticisms. "You are cutting stuff that is too small and you ought to be able to see it with a glass eye. That pole you just sawed wouldn't make a lead pencil big enough to write out your time with. Let that tree alone. It's as hollow as your fool heads and ain't fit for shingle blocks. See that one there! Get after it next while I blaze a few to show you Scandihoovians what kind of stuff we want." He jerked an ax out of a log and vanished into the swamp, the "chuck" of his falling blade closely following his disappearance.

Athlete though he had been and close observer

of the feats of college strong men, Wilson, nevertheless, was rooted to the spot by a feeling that was almost awe as he saw the prowess of the two blond-bearded sons of the vikings. Logs thirty feet long and which would have been a fair burden for a horse they raised by one end to the shoulder, worked their way under them to the center, balanced them and bore them away unfaltering. Poles that an ordinarily strong man would have staggered under they sent flying through the trees almost lance-like with tremendous sweeps of their arms. Ceaselessly their saws rang, their axes bit, the poles flew and the burden bearing went on until at the end of fifteen minutes the watcher wondered that they did not drop exhausted in their tracks, yet he knew that this was but the first half hour of the long day's work. Flint returning threw aside his ax and led on to where the road ended abruptly amongst the brush.

"Here is where you begin. We want to put this road through to the stream half a mile ahead so we can use the sleds on it before the drive starts. Dodge the big trees where you have to, but work in as straight a line as you can. Mow

down that brush into a stubble with your ax and slaughter the small stuff that gets in your way. Chop out bad roots and cut everything out of the road that will catch a runner or a hoof. What you can't handle alone I'll send the horses in to drag out after you get through. Keep busy now because I'll check you up in a day or two." With these words he was gone back along the road, leaving the road monkey to his lone fight against the forest.

With the misgivings with which a novice picks up a strange tool the swamper selected a sapling that barred the way, measured his distance from it by eye and smote at it tremendously with the ax. The blade missed the mark by several inches and buried itself in the frozen earth, while the smiter, whirled from his balance by the force of the blow, nearly fell upon it. He regained his poise, stepped a foot nearer and tried again with less force and more caution. This time he hit the object of his attack but the steel, held at a wrong angle, glanced from the bark and left but a white scar where it should have bitten deep. He settled himself more firmly in his tracks and tried a third time, was fairly successful and five

minutes later and after many wasted and imperfect strokes, had the satisfaction of seeing his first tree fall. But a long splinter stood penetrating the air where the cut-off should have been sharp and clean, and this he haggled down by an awkward using of the ax held hatchet fashion in one hand, then cast his eyes about for another victim. He did not have far to search, and though he did better this time it was a botch job at the best, and already feeling his arms grow tired he sought to vary his work by dragging the trunks aside. Despite the bitter air the perspiration was beading his forehead and his breath came rapidly, yet he worked on unceasingly until the sun was well afloat and its rays bright upon the spotless snow. His hands were blistered, his arms and back ached tremendously and his knees wobbled beneath him as he toiled, and at last, ashamed as he was of his slow progress, he was driven to the consciousness that he must stop for a spell of exertionless breathing. He let his ax drop upon the snow and made a few rapid mental calculations as he removed his cap and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I got up at half past four, was through

breakfast before five and must have started to work here about six. It has been about four hours since Flint left, which makes it ten o'clock now and only two more hours to dinner time. Well, I suppose I can live through that." He drew out his watch to verify his calculation and glanced at the dial. It was ten minutes after eight.

Unable to believe that the lagging hands moved at all he held the timepiece to his ear, shook it, found that it still ticked merrily and then utterly dejected dropped to a seat upon a log. What had seemed to him at least four hours had in reality been but two. And four more must drag themselves by before noon with its blessed respite would free him for the time being from his task. Then would follow a half mile walk to camp which would consume precious minutes, a hurried gulping down of dinner, a fifteen minutes' rest and the tramp back again to five hours more of backbreaking. As he looked forward to what was to come it did not seem possible that he could last out the day, and the impulse was almost irresistible to throw down his blade and abandoning his work strike through

the woods for the nearest town. Then as he thought of the weakness of such an act, the old spirit of physical obstinacy that had known no such thing as quitting in the grueling contests of the field arose within him and he shut his teeth doggedly. From out of the past there came before his mental eye the sharply defined panorama of his last and greatest race five years before, when in perfect physical condition he had been pitted against the best men of half a dozen colleges for the ten mile cross country run. Every stage of that heartbreaking struggle arose vividly before him; the first labored breathing and sharp stabbing pains about his heart, the blinding sweat that had filled his eyes and the gasping, drunken struggle up the hill two miles further on, when he seemed to taste his own blood and the world swam dizzily in a sky of red. Then, as though looking at himself in a mirror, he saw the stumble and fall from exhaustion and the slow crawl to the creek where he lay upon his stomach in the water for five precious minutes before he arose for the final two miles' spurt, refreshed and breathing easily once more but with Chase a good two hundred

yards in the lead. He had believed that he was hopelessly behind, yet he had struggled on dauntlessly and when the end came had fallen unconscious under the tape a yard in the lead, a winner by sheer grit and driving power of will. Well, he was far from being in perfect physical condition now, but at least he still had his grit. His breath had returned and he arose and fell upon his task again, more slowly and methodically now but learning his ax with every stroke. Even at this slower rate of working he doubted his ability to last out the forenoon, but an hour later and when he least expected it relief came.

Through the woods the chore "boy," sixty years of age came shuffling, bearing a great box strapped upon his shoulders and uttering at frequent intervals a weird cry. Wilson ceasing his efforts stared at him uncomprehendingly. But he was not long in gathering the significance of the call, for bursting from out of the forest with the eagerness of hunger-gnawed wolves came a score of men who followed close on the heels of the shuffling figure. And the road monkey now scenting what was to come threw down his implement and jogged along in

their train. A short distance further on among the trees a fire was crackling cheerfully under a suspended bucket, and from out of the box and into the outstretched hands the chore boy passed bread and meat, hot potatoes and pastry to be washed down by huge gulps of scalding tea. Then seated upon logs or stretched upon the snow the woodsmen filled their pipes for a few dozen puffs before returning to their labors. It was but a brief rest, but a priceless one, and the tea warmed and the meat strengthened the nearly exhausted swamper until at the summons he retraced his steps a man refreshed. But the long day was only a quarter over.

How Wilson survived those first twelve hours of ax swinging and log lifting he scarcely knew; still as in the long race, pure grit won out. When night came so great was his fatigue that even hunger was absent, and so sore was his body that he groaned as he shed his clothes and crawled painfully into his bunk. But sleep came to him almost instantly, and before the crew had finished their meal he was unconscious of his sufferings of the past. And returning to the bunkhouse after what had been but a common-

place day for them they saw him sleeping there, and realizing his condition laughed at him as they passed. But of all this the sleeper knew nothing, and had he known was too weary to have cared. An hour later the walking boss entering glanced at the new hand and then turned to the grinning crew.

"You let that man alone except to give him a lift when he needs it. He's the worst sample of a woodsman that ever chewed down a sapling, but he's got plenty of muscle and more brains than all the rest of you put together. I'm going to make a man of him yet."

He left the room with these words, leaving his hearers grinning sardonically.

CHAPTER IV

SIX weeks of monotonous toil, barren of all things that made life worth the living save perfect health, passed slowly over Wilson's head. But physical suffering was now a thing of the past. The callouses upon his hands were horn-like, and his endurance seemed as endless as that of the mighty Norwegians themselves. Incomparable air vitalized and filtered by snows and pine, combined with well-nigh ceaseless exertion and an abundance of wholesome food and profound slumbers had done their work well, and he stood among his companions a stronger and more enduring man than he had been in the height of his physical renown. His muscles were swollen again, and at his every movement they played beneath his white skin like miniature billows beneath a smooth sea. He had gained nearly a score of pounds in weight, yet not an ounce of useless flesh was upon him. He was active, steady nerved, hard as nails. And

in looks he had improved almost beyond belief. His beard, short and jet black, he wore neatly trimmed, and now that he no longer especially feared detection he had discarded his disfiguring glasses. Neither did his head any longer look like the back of a clipped porcupine, but bore hair long enough to make a comb indispensable. He was a silent man, doing his work with few words and often with thoughts that were far away, for never during his waking hours did the dull ache within his bosom cease except when Grayford's face as he had last seen it arose before him. At those times something seemed to pierce him through and through, and he would double up a bit with a quick catching of his breath as though he had been stabbed in a vital spot. Then the sudden pang would be over and the dull throb begin again.

The last four weeks had been strenuous ones for the crew of Camp 5. A few days after Wilson arrived a wind from out of the south had melted the snow like butter upon a warm grid-dle; then the mercury dived to the zero mark again and the much longed-for snows fell, if they fell at all, elsewhere. It was at this inop-

portune time to Findlay that the construction department of the Isthmus & Soo railroad decided to sink a spur deep into the body of the woods and connect Archer with Turtle Junction in order that they might better handle the ore traffic. When Dunham, the gray old timber fox who had charge of such things for the railroad, received his orders to "go ahead," he closed his lips so tightly around his long black cigar that it looked like a spike driven into a crack. Then he began talking to himself as he sent the smoke spouting towards the ceiling.

"That tie contract will have to go either to the Badger Lumber Company or to Findlay. Well, of course everybody knows how they feel towards each other. I don't mean to say that they exactly hate each other, but if Findlay should happened to get burned to a crisp in a forest fire, old Meyer of the Badger outfit would put up a monument with "Well Done" on it over his remainders, while if Meyer happened to go through the ice Findlay would throw him the biggest rock on the bank for a life preserver. Therefore, if they happened to meet in my office here—by accident of course—they'd bristle up

like a couple of fighting pups and begin reaching for leg holds instanter. Result would be that the I. & S. would get a tie contract from one or the other of them that would make the successful bidder hate himself to death before he got through carrying it out." So having reasoned it out along this line Dunham beckoned to his amanuensis.

"Miss Johnson, I wish you would write a letter to Mr. Meyer of the Badger Company, asking him to call upon me on the tenth at two o'clock, and send a similar note to John Findlay, telling him I should be pleased to meet him here on the eleventh at the same hour. Of course you will be very careful not to get those dates mixed."

"Trust me," replied Miss Johnson pertly. Then she sat down to her machine and made one of the blunders that they paid her a double salary for instinctively knowing when to perpetrate. The consequence was that Meyer and Findlay met point blank in Dunham's office on the tenth. Dunham seemed greatly distressed over the circumstance and gave his callers cigars to prove it.

"But now, boys," he said as the rivals glowered

at each other through the smoke fog, "seeing that we are all here together we might as well drop sentiment and have a little medicine talk. The I. & S. wants those ties at bed rock price, and it wants them as soon as quick movements and man's inhumanity to man can deliver them. What are your figures, Meyer?"

"Thirty thousand dollars," said Meyer as he thieved a quick glance at his rival from across the Manitouwish.

"And yours, John?"

"Twenty-five thousand."

"Then I'll call it twenty-five thousand, too," responded Meyer promptly. Externally Dunham remained cool, but internally he was aglow with a warm, glad smile. The approximate bottom price had been reached at the first jump, and he was politic enough not to haggle over hundreds. But there was another important point to be settled, and his heavy lashes fell over his eyes like shades as he concentrated his gaze on the ash of his cigar.

"Well, I guess the price is near enough right, boys, if we can get together on the question of delivery. Of course it is understood that time is

the essence of this contract. When can you deliver those ties in our yard at Archer, Mr. Meyer?"

The black brows of the Badger man contracted as he gazed deep into the silent woods. "Between April first and tenth, depending on how soon the break-up comes. But you may be sure of one thing, Mr. Dunham, that stuff will go down the river with the ice, and the man don't live who can beat that for quick delivery. The Badger company will do its damndest—and angels can do no more." Findlay sat looking at them in grim silence, and Dunham after giving him plenty of time in which to make a bid, husked a dry cough from his voice and went on thoughtfully.

"Pretty late, but I don't suppose I can ask you to deliver them by air ship at those figures. Our minds have met as to price, and, of course, which one of you gets the contract makes no difference to me. But inasmuch as Mr. Meyer spoke first and Mr. Findlay can't better the bid I suppose I might as well let Meyer—"

"Hold on," broke in Findlay as his jaw suddenly thrust itself out. "If I give you a fifty

thousand dollar bond that I will deliver those ties at Archer, March first, thirty days before Mr. Meyer's date, do I get that contract?"

Dunham glanced at Meyer, and Meyer staring at his rival said nothing at all. So presently Dunham said "yes," and at that word Findlay arose.

"My word for my bond in three days. Good day, gentlemen."

The door closed behind him and the remaining two sat looking at each other silently. What Meyer said when his tongue began working is entirely unprintable; what Dunham said in consoling him was approximately this:

"I'll get his ties or his money and that is all I want. He will probably go busted trying to carry it through on time and that will be satisfaction enough for you. Sorry you lost out, old man. Take another smoke."

So with that the incident ended. John Findlay strode away as many another victor has done, his heart thumping from the strife of battle but his reason telling him that he had risked too much. Long and bitter had been the fight that he had waged in those cold north woods, and to

lose out now spelled ruin just as his star of hope was rising brightly above the horizon. Therefore it is not to be wondered at that he and Flint for the next week sat day by day in the little office of the sawmill as they smoked steadily and spat intermittently into the sawdust-filled box, but at the end of that time they arose together as if by mutual agreement and shook the inactivity from them as a buffalo bull shakes away the dust of his noonday rumination when he has finally decided to give mortal battle to his enemy.

"Of course there is only one way to do it and that is to build an ice road from Camp 5 to Archer," said Flint. "We have sat around here for a week waiting for snow, but what there is of it on the ground now isn't as thick as a man's skin. But I'll lay out a route and we'll put things through somehow. You attend to your end of the business which is to furnish the money and leave the work to me." So Findlay went to town and the walking boss disappeared in the woods.

For the next week Flint blazed his way through frozen tamarack swamps, across old

slashings and over hardwood ridges while Findlay waited to hear from him. The cold was intense, the river covered itself with a foot of armor and more than once the lean wolf-pack kept the lone woods cruiser close company as he swung campward in the gloom of evening with their red eyes upon him. Endlessly the deserted woods stretched away on every side and close above them the gray cloud masses sailed, but the wind blew steadily from the north and no snow came. Scarcely an inch of it covered the ground, and the great sprinklers that had been built with a rush stood inert and helpless at the camps like uncouth monsters bound to the earth by ice manacles. But on the eighth day the walking boss telegraphed his employer and that night the two men met at Archer. Flint began pulling off pair after pair of socks and his eyes were as bright as though he had only traveled two miles instead of twenty through the brush since morning.

"I've got the route laid out and there is only one bad hill upon it," he said through the ice of his mustache. "And we can get over that rise all right with a couple of extra teams to yank the

sleds up and plenty of straw on the downshoot to grouser them on the come-down. I'll put an ice road through here that will make that Badger crowd see its shadow on Candlemas day or leave my pelt hanging in the woods to make whiplashes of. A month from now you will be able to skate from Camp 5 to Archer if you feel like it." His employer looked at him approvingly.

"Of course we'll do it some way, but how are you going to get those big sprinklers going without snow?" he asked after a while. "You can't sled them over the bare ground, of course, and how are you going to get a slideway for the first trip?"

"Skin the river of its ice and lay it before the sprinklers in slabs as we go. Once over the route with the water sleds and we can cement and broaden it out quickly enough if the cold keeps up. I'll be hauling ten thousand to the load before February ends, and that is something no man has done yet in this neck of the woods. But of course it is going to cost some money to build that road."

"All right, I'll stand for it," returned John as he drew his chair close to the table. Sitting

silently beside the walking boss he watched him as the latter rapidly sketched a bird's-eye plat of the country through which the road was to wind, until with the coming of midnight they arose and crept into their bunks. Duller became the blush of the heater and thicker grew the frost coat on the narrow windows that burrowed through the huge logs of the camp. The cold came creeping beneath the door and the water in the pail in the corner thickened and froze, while the night breath of the sleepers curled from their lips like wisps of steam. The last red ember in the heater expired with a crack, the pawings from the nearby stable ceased and over all fell the hush of the great north woods, unbroken save by the fall of a broken limb and the faint hunting song of the distant running pack.

Four o'clock came and the chore boy crept from under his blankets with the whirl of the alarm clock still in his ears. Shuddering with the cold he crept into his clothing and then stepped into the biting air without. Overhead the stars were glimmering and the moon was still leagues from her western harbor. The dull, red glow of lamps shone through the windows

of the cook shanty and the steamy smell of breakfast filled his nose as he hurried past, but the bunkhouse with its seventy sleeping men was black save for the night lamp. Hurriedly he thrust his head within the door, voiced his long vibrant cry of "R-o-l-l o-u-t, r-o-l-l o-u-t," then passed quickly to the "office" and opened the door. The tall form of Flint already fully dressed towered above him, the unshaven, weather beaten face looking in the lamplight as a mask cut from hickory bark.

"Don't mind it so much when I once get into action," said the walking boss to Findlay as the latter was breaking the ice of the pail preparatory to his morning's ablutions. He stretched a pair of muscle plaited arms towards the ceiling. "I've been getting up by moonlight most of the time for the last thirty years, and I guess I'll be going to sleep by it pretty regular for the next thirty days anyway while we are getting that ice road going. Generally mornings when I wake up and think what I have got to go through before I can turn in again, I feel like turning over and taking a little nap for a couple of million years and getting

good and rested." Findlay looked at the speaker over his towel.

"Now that kind of talk makes me tired. What you need is a little exercise to liven you up. You haven't done anything but sleep for the last four hours and you are getting hog fat and lazy. But if you do a good job on that ice road I'll give you all day off on Christmas. Come on to breakfast and quit kicking." He slipped his arm through that of the other and they followed the horn-call into the cook shanty, while the chore boy gazed after them in slack-jawed amazement.

"Now what do you think of that?" he muttered. "Wants to sleep for two million years! That walking boss is certainly lazy."

Flint built the road in a little less than three weeks, but he only averaged about one-fifth of the time asleep while he did it. As for the men who worked under him during that frenzied period, they cursed him without intermission while the work was going on, and are still bragging about having had a hand in it. First swamping out the road they filled the low places with brush and broke it down beneath the hoofs of their

heavy horses, and having thus made the foundation they laid ice slabs before the sprinklers. Beneath the constant flow of water from the four horse tanks it became like adamant. The road was finished on the twenty-fourth of December and it was a good thing to look at. Flint had grown pounds thinner, but he forgot all about his loss of flesh when John Findlay after the last critical inspection of the road took him by the hand and shook it without saying a word. Barring his natural gift in the way of handling high-power expletives Flint was not much of a talker, and he admired a man who could express himself as fluently as that by a handshake.

Christmas morning came clear and bitterly cold, the woods deserted of toilers, the travois motionless in the shallow snow and the great ice-hung sprinklers sleeping upon the roadway that they had builded by sun, moon and starlight with their spoutings. Heavy feet crunched the brittle snow without the office of Camp 5, and at the first sound Flint thrust a heavy automatic pistol into his pocket and then leaned indolently against the logs. The next instant the door was burst open and in lurched a body of woodsmen

who crowding into the corners of the cabin left the center of the room empty, while Lebeau who led them, drawing a piece a chalk from his pocket, drew a wide, crude circle upon the boards.

"Bah, you walking boss. Like a dog you work us in ze cold to make ze cursed ice road. Like a loup garou you work us and swing your ax when ze moon shine. Like a devil you make a noise when we whale a horse to build you ze corderoy more soon. Somebody say you can fight fast. He lie. I make you a square circle on ze floor and give you invitation. I explain to you ze pleasure of a contest with ze foot. I teach you la savatte. You weesh to learn ze grand trick?"

The gray eyes of the walking boss grew hard as flint, but his voice was silken as he made his slow reply. "Not to-day, Joe. We have all had a hard time of it for the last month and I guess most of us are a little off our feed just at present. Go back to your bunk and take a good sleep. We will need you early in the morning."

Lebeau's lip curled and a flash of his big white teeth came from beneath it as he ground the

chalk under his heel. "Who need me to-morr?"

"Findlay, who needs every good man he has. And you are one of his best, Joe, and that is the reason we let you have the gray team. You ought to appreciate that much, anyway." Angrily the Canadian doubled his fists as he spat upon the floor.

"M'sieur Findlay. Ba' Cras how I love heem. I weesh him a Merry Christmas in the devil's cook shanty; is it not so, Pete Mullet? Come you with me. Follow Joe Lebeau and he will show you joy. We will drink, we will dance, we will make ridicule. Come with Joe Lebeau."

Out into the open air he swaggered, his band behind him, and Wilson remaining behind heard them go roaring down the ice road towards Archer. And as the last yell died away he saw the forehead of Flint wrinkle like a pool into which a stone is thrown while tense lines bound the lips together. For Flint well knew that once fairly started on a big drunk the crew would scatter from the Soo to Sturgeon Bay, and every day was almost priceless to him now with the

driving work that lay ahead. Moodily he stood at the window and stared into the silent woods, but down in the cook shanty cook and cookee were grinning at each other delightedly. There would be few to feed that night, and even so brief a respite was hailed with delight by the pair that for weeks had cooked and washed the dishes four times a day for seventy ravening humans.

Noon came with Wilson, Flint and the cook the only inmates of the long tables of the shanty. Silently they ate until the walking boss, finishing his meal, arose with a nod at the swamper. "Come with me," he said brusquely. "I'm going down to that log dive in the woods near Archer and start that crew back here or bust things up somewhat. After I have done that I want you to go on to the store and wait there until to-morrow. Findlay will be there some time during the day and I want to hear from him in regard to some telegraph poles. He will probably want to send out word by you." Into the cutter they got and with the wind whistling past their ears went whistling down the glistening roadway. Six miles from camp the walking

boss drew hard on the reins and motioned for his companion to dismount.

"They are in a log joint over here to the left a little way. Neither Findlay nor the Badger people allow any liquor sold on their holdings, but there is a saloon keeper from down the road who comes up here holiday time with a barrel of whisky and gets them going. You go on to the store and wait there for Findlay while I take care of them." The swamper following on along the road was soon lost among the trees; Flint turning up the tote road hitched his team a hundred yards from the dive and approached it upon foot, his jaws set grimly. From the outside of the door he heard the voice of Lebeau raised in bull-like bellowings.

"Ze walking boss—he no good. He say you mus' not sleep, you mus' not eat, you mus' not take pleasure, but all ze time you mus' work, all day, all night. He crack his whip and you mus' leap. He shake his fist and you mus' break your back. Bah! I grow weary of him. To-morr' I meet him in the camp and I crack his neck. I fix him fine."

The door of the shack opened and the tall

form of the boss towered before them. Motionless he stood while his gray eyes settled hard upon them, and before his gaze the tumult sickened and died. The fight that had raged in a corner degenerated to a scuffle, and the heavy feet of the dancers grew still in the presence of this man who had driven them as no man ever had before. Calmly, but with each word forceful as a bullet Flint spoke.

"This thing has got to stop. I've got to have you back in the woods to-morrow and you must get back to camp while you are able to walk. I've been a patient man to-day but I've reached my limit. Now clean yourselves out of here before I clean you."

Sullenly they turned upon him, shifting on their feet and glancing at each other uneasily. And seeing their doggedness an ominous glitter came into the pupils of the boss as roughly he shouldered his way to the back of the shack and drew a small cylinder from his pocket. "Dynamite cartridge with a two-minute tail," he said as he set it upon the stove and held a flaming match above it. "You want to dance and drink some more do you? Well, unless you hike out

of here you'll all be doing a quickstep to-night for the devil." Deliberately he lighted the fuse and took his stand behind the cartridge with his pistol drawn. Stern and uncompromising, meeting their wild glances unwinkingly, he looked the incarnation of Will, and before him their crude courage failed as the courage of the lion fails before the unfathomable eyes of his keeper. No man knew just how far Flint would go in the enforcing of an order and now none waited to see. Struggling, cursing, roaring, they fought their way out of the door and went swarming down the road, while the boss extinguishing the fuse threw the cartridge far into the woods. Down the woods lane the runaways were staggering into the distance, wrangling, fighting, howling insanely.

The afternoon sun sank until it seemed to rest on the tops of the western forest like a broad gold piece poised delicately. And the walking boss arising from a log beside his cutter where he had sat for an hour following the rout climbed upon the seat. Back along the rough woods trail he went until the gleaming ice road lay before him, then turned upon it. For three

miles he drove rapidly, the wind smarting his cheeks and the ice particles cut from the road by the sharp hoofs pelting him like flying fragments of glass. Then as his half galloping ponies swung around a bend in the forest road they suddenly arose upon their hind legs with wild pawings at the air. Less than a dozen yards in front of them and lying flat upon his back on the ice was the first of the fallen that Flint had feared would litter the homeward route.

"Get out of the way," yelled the boss as with whip and bit he brought the rearing animals back to earth. The steel corks of the beasts played a tattoo upon the ice close to the motionless form, and Flint, throwing his weight on the lines, pulled the broncos by main force against the whiffle-trees.

"Get out of the way or I'll cut you into three pieces with the sled runners," cried the boss still more harshly. But the legs of the lumber jack only kicked spasmodically and Flint, shortening his reins, leaped to the ice. "Can't leave you here to freeze up solid, much as I'd like to," he grunted as he dumped the limp form head-

long into the sleigh box behind. "But I'll make you pay for this ride to-morrow." Onward the ponies sprang again with nervous leaps, the whip flicking lightly over them, and with half way to Camp 5 covered and with but a single helpless one in his keeping the driver's grip on the lines relaxed a bit and his face grew smoother. At the next turn of the road it roughened again, however, and the first oath that had escaped his lips that day burst from him explosively. Fairly in front of him and locked in each other's arms as they had gone to sleep fighting were Jimmy Hard Boots and Ole Sawlog. Along the next hundred yards four more men were strewn like skirmishers fallen in battle.

One by one the walking boss laboriously raised them and piled them upon each other in the box, wedging the last man firmly between the dashboard and the seat. "Any more of you woodcats lying around in the brush?" he called. Closely following his words from the deep shadow of the wayside the big figure of Lebeau arose from a lesser form on which he had been sitting.

"Ze pig hog," he exclaimed with a gesture at

the one who lay silently. "He make me ze grand insult. He say I eat ze frog. By gar, I beat upon him like a drum. Is it not so, you walking boss?"

"Looks that way, Joe," said Flint very quietly. He dropped the reins and raised another two hundred pounds of dead weight in his arms. The only unoccupied place in the sleigh was his own seat and upon it he placed his burden and flicked the sweat from his forehead into the zero air. "Guess you and I will have to hoof it into camp, Lebeau," he said over his shoulder. With a quick leap the big Canadian was upon the sleigh, and trampling the slumberers beneath his feet as though they had been sawlogs, clambered the human pile and from its summit glowered down upon the boss with the light of battle shining in his jet black eyes.

"Get down," cried Flint, his voice as harsh as the rasp of a saw. The derisive laugh of the great woodsman went reverberating deep into the forest.

"I weesh I remain up here. All winter I skid logs in ze cold. Each day I make ten t'ousand steps in ze snow. Each night I rub down my

team and make heem shine like a shoe. I am fatigue. I mos' expire. Now I, Joe Lebeau, shall ride." Three steps and Flint was opposite him.

"You weren't too tired to fight, and any man that can fight can walk. Get off there." The dark face of the other grew still darker.

"I make you ridicule. I laugh before you. I, Joe Lebeau, bes' man in ze woods shall ride. You walking boss, bah!"

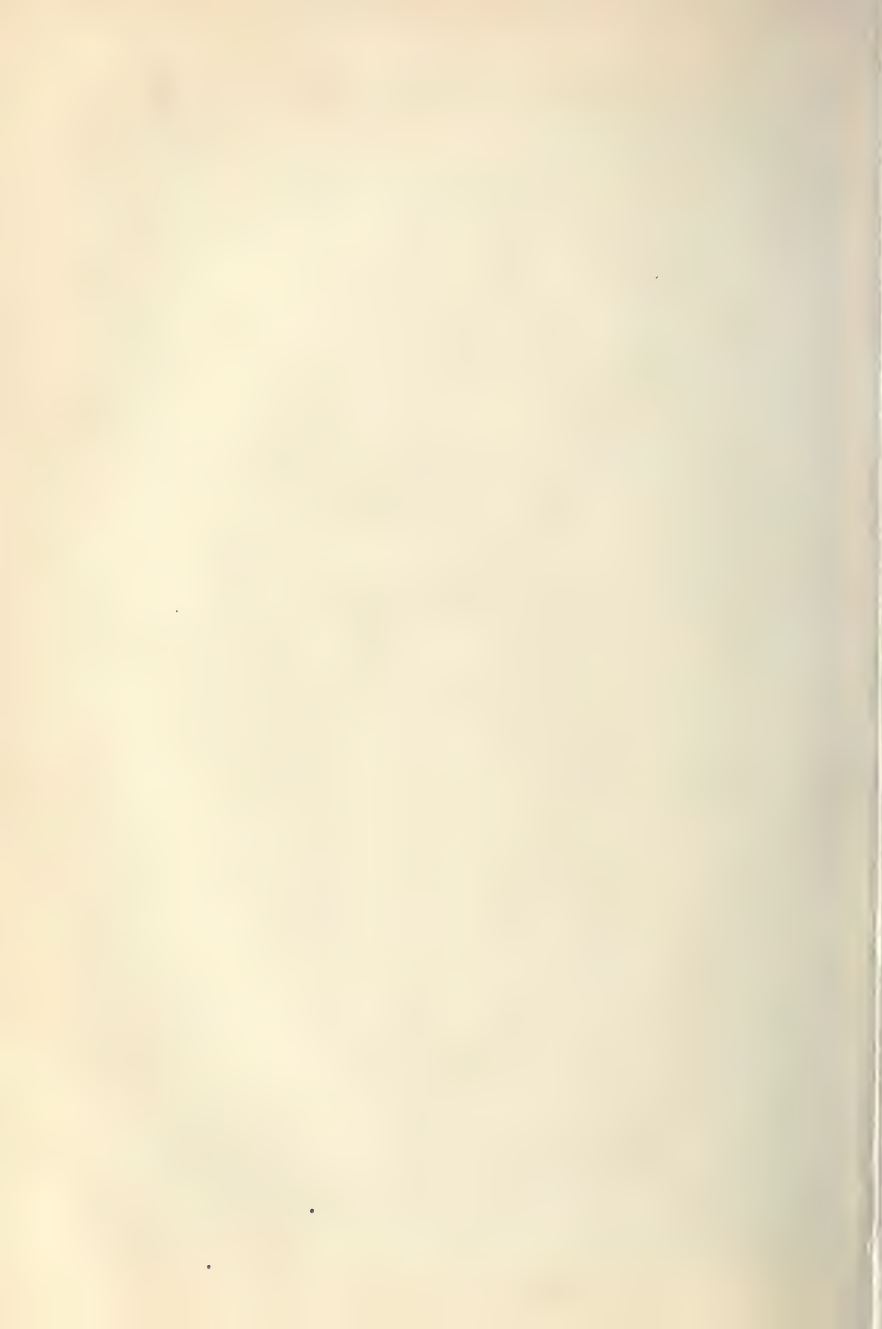
Five minutes later Flint, now far up the road and walking beside his ponies looked back through the shimmer. Lebeau was just staggering to his feet.

The moon sailed high and the black shadows of the forest lay heavily upon the clearings. Far away towards Loon lake again came the faint song of the running pack and the yells from the bunkhouse gradually ceased. Flint hurrying back on his way from Camp 2 where he had gone to quell an incipient riot drew a deep breath of relief as he threw open the office door at Camp 5.

"They are sleeping all right now and will be in fair shape for me to break their backs again



“Any Man That Can Fight, Can Walk”



to-morrow. And most likely they won't lick up another drop of fire-water until after camp breaks up in the spring. And maybe after all —" his forehead roughened as he thought of what they had done for him in the last three weeks—"maybe after all that they have gone through lately they were entitled to their little jamboree. Poor devils! There is not much pleasure in this world for them—not much—not much."

For the first time since he had arisen at four o'clock that morning the walking boss fumbled his watch from his pocket and glanced at it. The hands pointed to twelve, and seating himself upon his bunk he unlaced his long boots and tossed them beside the heater.

"Guess I have been working under forced draught myself lately—anyway I feel as if I could use up a good share of those two million years' sleep I'll have coming one of these days. And this is the day Findlay told me I could have off if I made a good job of that ice road," he muttered. Wearily his eyelids fell and his rugged form seemed to soften and shrink as the hand of the great restorer fell heavily upon him. The chore boy entering at that moment warily

approached him. "When shall I wake them up?" he asked. Flint stared at him.

"As soon as they get good and asleep of course. They won't know whether they have slept an hour or a week." Then mackinaw and trousers, stockings and all he threw himself face downward upon the bunk.

CHAPTER V

THE train arriving at two o'clock the next day, two hours late as usual on a run of thirty miles, brought Findlay with it. So greatly altered in looks was Wilson that his employer looked at him without a glimmer of recollection that they had ever met before until the swamper made known his identity, whereat the elder man first stared and then chuckled.

"Guess you have eaten twice as much of my grub as you have earned, let alone the wages that are coming to you," he grinned. "However, I don't begrudge food when it does a man as much good as it has you. You look strong enough to pull this county out of the map by the grub roots. Now run out to camp and tell Flint to get out an order for a thousand telegraph poles, cedar, strict regulation. Tell him that I ain't in any particular hurry for them, but remind him that I am waiting. I don't suppose he will happen to have them in his pocket, but if he has

it will be fortunate. From the looks of the sky and the feel of the air it is going to storm at last, and I would recommend that you get your feet started hitting that trail hard and fast for I'd hate to think it was snowing on you." He started up the hill without more ado, and Wilson thinking first of the cozy corner of the cottage towards which his employer was wending his way, and second of the long lonely trail that stretched between himself and the uncouth building which was his only home, glued his eyes upon the path and "hit it" after the manner of the logger's recommendation.

As the camp owner had prophesied the snows were at last hanging heavy above them. Masses of full-bellied clouds seemed to rest upon the higher tree tops, drooping ash-colored from a mulatto sky. Nor had the traveler gone a quarter of a mile before the first big flake melted against the tip of his nose, and five minutes later the air was hazy with the downfall. By the time he had covered half a mile the trail was beginning to lose its outlines, but he had been over it before, remembered it and trudged on without a pause, until he stopped of a sudden and

bent low over the snow. Before him were a number of tracks much like those of a huge dog, and although they had already been dimmed by the fall from above he knew that the beasts that had made them had but very recently passed. Wolf tracks were common things about Camp 5 and he now inspected these more from curiosity than any other idea. His halt was but brief, however, and a few seconds later he was again upon his way. But a hundred yards further on he came to another dead stop with an exclamation of wonderment.

For there were other tracks imprinted before him now, not the tracks of a beast but those of a human, and that human was beyond the shadow of a doubt a woman. He inspected them carefully and saw that she had come up the main trail to this point, hesitated there and then branched off upon a deer path that led deep into the woods. A minute's survey and analysis of the outlines told him what had happened as well as though he had stood upon the spot and seen it with his eyes. The woman had come hurrying along the trail towards Archer, had accidentally run across a couple of wolves, had be-

come alarmed by their sullen refusal to clear the road for her and had gone down the deer path to avoid them. Why she had gone this distance within the woods he could not even surmise, but there was only one woman residing in Archer and that woman was Barbara Findlay.

He glanced at the darkening sky and whirling flakes and then turned upon the deer trail and went trotting softly along it. The one who had made the tracks before him had walked very fast and he now saw where she had stumbled upon a hidden root and fallen—starting to run after regaining her feet. He quickened his gait as he saw the increased length of the fugitive's stride, glancing from the trail to the woods about him from time to time in the constant expectation of seeing her close at hand. He had no fear for her actual safety, at least not as yet, for he knew the usual cowardice of the brutes that had alarmed her and realized that had she but faced them boldly they would in all probability have skulked away. But her anxiety at suddenly finding herself in such company must have been considerable, and it was more with the idea of quieting her mentally than protecting her phys-

ical being that caused him to desire to overtake her as quickly as possible. Still, one could never tell what hunger-goaded wild beasts would do, and she had doubtless greatly augmented their courage by her display of fear. However they would scarcely attack her under any circumstances before she became exhausted, and he confidently expected to overtake her long before that time arrived. But as he ran the consciousness was gradually forced upon him that he had greatly underestimated the agility and lung capacity of this free-moving girl of the pines, for a full twenty minutes had already passed and it was with difficulty that he could longer distinguish her footprints in the rapidly settling darkness of the mid-winter sky. He was becoming alarmed lest he should lose her trail altogether in the gloom when the tracks, running fairly against a tree that had fallen and lodged in the top of its fellows, stopped abruptly.

Stepping beyond the tree he searched for their continuation but the snow was trackless and he paused in bewilderment. And just as he had reached the conclusion that she must have vanished into the air, from above him there came a

small voice half plaintive, half mocking, that called "Here I am, mister," and looking up he saw a snow-shrouded figure huddled in the slanting tree top a dozen feet above his head. She had become tired from her long run, chanced across this fallen trunk with its comparatively easy incline and scrambled up it to safety among the branches, and he smiled to himself at the figure he must have cut from her viewpoint as he crept around beneath her with his nose almost in the snow. He seated himself upon a log and looked up at her.

"Well!" he exclaimed after a moment's pause.

"Quite well—thank you," came the answer to the accompaniment of a chattering laugh. "Only somewhat chilly. Won't you come up?"

"Better come down. It's snowing up there," he suggested. She shook her head and a feathery puff toppled from her red toboggan cap onto his upturned face.

"No. I am afraid of the wolves."

He answered her with a trace of the half mockery with which she had first saluted him. "Is it possible? Now do you know from the

way they ran I had supposed you were chasing them." Then arising he went clambering up the incline, his rubbers gripping the rough surface firmly, and reaching her held out his hand. "Come with me," he commanded.

For an instant she peered into his face through the semi-darkness and then uttered a little triumphant laugh. "I thought I recognized your voice. I know you in spite of your disguise. You are the one who—"

"Yes, I know," he interrupted a trifle impatiently because of the lateness of the afternoon and the real necessity that they lose no time. "The last time I saw you I helped you up. Now I am going to help you down. Take my hand and feel your way with your feet. If you slip I'll catch you."

"Then you may be sure I will not slip."

He secretly wished that she would, but nothing came of it and a moment later they were upon the snow. Beneath the closely woven canopy of evergreens it was almost dark, and it was only after a sharp search that the man was able to ferret out his tracks of five minutes before. "Keep close behind me and tell me how

it happened as we go," he suggested as he started back along the way they had come.

She followed him. "I had gone over to visit Mrs. Evers whose husband has a small farm over east. She is the only woman I know around here and we visit back and forth sometimes. It is only three miles from Archer to their house and I can walk it in an hour when the trails are good. We did not notice the storm coming this afternoon and I talked on until the snow began to fall. Then I came as quickly as I could to get dinner for daddy. I had not gone far when I met some wolves. They were very impudent and did not get out of my way when I ordered them to. I "shooed" them and shook my skirts but they only grinned at me—such a disagreeable grin. Then I screamed in their faces as loud as I could and they howled most dreadfully. I must confess that I became a little frightened and thought I would go down the deer trail and go around them, but they came along on each side of me until all I could think of was Little Red Riding Hood. I was watching them instead of the trail and tripped and fell and they

acted so pleased to see me down, as if they were going to leap on me, that I jumped up and ran as fast as I could although I knew it was foolish. They kept on trotting beside me and when I got to that tree I climbed it and waited for you to come. It was their eyes and teeth that frightened me—they were perfectly wolfish.”

“You waited for me!” wondered the stooping leader. “What on earth made you think I would come?”

She chuckled. “Well, of course I meant ‘you’ in the plural sense of all mankind. I knew some of you men would come and drive them away because women don’t get eaten up by wolves any more to amount to much. Where do you suppose they are now?”

Wilson halted and looked about, then drawing his clasp knife cut a stout sapling to the length of a staff and began trimming it. “Oh, sneaking off in the brush somewhere. They won’t come near us,” he rejoined absently. The girl’s eyes were watching him narrowly.

“Then why are you cutting that cudgel?”

“For a walking stick. The wolves are the

least of my troubles. But there is something else that is really worrying me. I can't find the trail."

"Then we are lost," she exclaimed with a matter-of-fact air that caused him to turn his face away to hide its smile.

"No, it is not quite as bad as that. We are not lost—we are right here. The trail is lost."

"Then I suppose we will have to sit here in the snow all night." Wilson negatived with his head.

"We will have to do a good deal more than that. Hear those pines rustling—feel that puff of wind! It is coming from the north and that means it is going to be bitterly cold before long. We will have to keep on moving, at least as long as we can see well enough to keep from running into things. Then, we may strike some old tote road that leads to town. Tell me if you get too tired and we will stop and build a fire. But we had better keep on going until you are pretty well played out. Besides, your father will be rather worried, you know."

"Yes, let us hurry on," she replied, now serious for the first time. But though they made

all speed possible their progress was but half as rapid as it had been before wandering from the trail. Brush heaps barred their way and fallen trees too high for her to clamber confronted them at nearly every turn, while through the gloom and falling snow they could scarcely see a yard in advance. Half an hour passed, and the labored breathing of the girl as she followed in his tracks bespeaking a pace too rapid, he was at the point of calling a halt when the woods broke before them and overhead he saw, not the black roof of the forest, but the misty gray of open sky, while close at hand and rising before him in their shrouds were the ghostly shapes of half a dozen buildings. With a deeply-drawn breath of relief he led her on until all at once there loomed before them that for which he had hoped. Scattered throughout the pineries are scores of abandoned logging camps, and it was upon one of these long-deserted places of former industry that they had chanced in their blind rambles. Joyfully the leader struck a match and bade her follow him.

The refuse of a deserted kitchen littered the floor. Battered pots and pans unworth the

carrying away, a "spider" with a broken handle, barrels and shrunken pails confronted him, but by the aid of more matches he saw that the wood-box was well filled. Selecting a piece of pine for a torch he lighted it and entered the bunkhouse with the blaze held high. Discarded blankets, ragged but still usable in case of emergency, abounded upon the deacon seats and bunks, and the sight of the mammoth heater in the center of the room brought him joy. Here they could at least be safe and fairly comfortable until morning, and with no further ill coming from the mishap than a night of acute worry for the girl's father. To start a fire in the heater was but the work of a smoky minute, and together they seated themselves upon the benches and watched the first pink blush of the roaring iron monster blossom into the red of a rose. Then arousing himself and searching further with his torch, the man found a lantern with a broken chimney containing nearly half a candle within it, and this he lighted and set upon the window sill close beside her. Outside the logs the forest was roaring like surf upon a rock beach, and once from out of the heart of

the woods there was borne to them by the whipping gale a howl that made each look into the other's eyes with a meaning smile. And in truth, the thought that two feet of solid logs separated them from all that howled and roared without was cause for smiling.

The snow fell faster. Whirled past the lighted window by the growing blizzard the flakes seemed phosphorescent streaks that merged with clouds of dim, meteor-like dust as the wind picked up whole snow-banks bodily and hurled them by. Although it was still but early evening, beyond the glow of the candle the outside world was but a snow-swept darkness, yet within the narrow light circle where the snow-bound pair sat the rude corner was almost inviting. Neither woman nor man had spoken for many minutes; he sitting with his eyes fastened upon the snow gusts that whirled by the pane, and she with her chin in her palms and an expression of wistfulness in her eyes, that were overhung and shaded by long dark lashes as ferns overhang and shade deep forest pools. Her lips were tightly closed and her forehead wrinkled—in fact her whole attitude so

thought-bound that the man turning from the snowflakes to her became instantly inquisitive.

"You seem to be thinking very hard about something," he ventured at last.

"And I am," she rejoined quickly.

"May I ask of what?"

"You may. I am thinking of my stomach. It is a vacuum!"

He got upon his feet, suddenly realizing that he also wished very much to eat. "If you will come with me we will forage," he said. Instantly she was at his side and together they crossed the gale-swept passageway and entered the cook shanty. There she took the lantern from him and held it high while he searched the shelves among the odds and ends, bringing forth from time to time hidden treasures; first a can of tomatoes that had been overlooked by the departed occupants and upon which they pounced greedily and disputed as to who should have the larger share. Next followed a few spoonfuls of salt caked in the bottom of a bag, and carefully hoarding this they descended to the root cellar where they found a dozen potatoes not much the worse for age, as many onions in fair repair and

a portion of a smoked ham, mold-encrusted without, but still wholesome about the bone. All these treasures they bore aloft and scattered upon the long table beside the salt and tomatoes as the gross results of the search. From out of the tin litter he selected a few of the least battered dishes, bent them back into a semblance of shape, and having scoured them thoroughly with snow he filled one from a drift and set it upon the stove.

"Good cook?" he inquired anxiously.

"Magnificent."

He sincerely hoped that she was, for the inadequacy of larder and utensils demanded that cunning hands should do the ministering. With his pocket knife he opened the tomato can, while the girl scrubbed the potatoes and onions into cleanliness. Then he sliced the ham under her directions and watched her admiringly as with sleeves tucked up she hovered about the stove with testing fork. But at the end of what seemed a small eternity, potatoes and ham, onions and tomatoes passed her rigid inspection, and with each dish served hot and hunger inspiring them they sat down to the feasting board;

he at the end of the long table like a feudal lord within the great banquet hall of his rough castle; she at his right as lady over all, his faithful ally and wise counselor. Then they ate, and ate.

She asked him how he liked her cooking, purposely letting her long lashes fall and coquetting with an onion as though it had been the cherry at the bottom of a glass. The enthusiasm of his reply was boundless as his heavily laden fork paused midway in its upward flight. "Immensely. Never have I tasted its equal, even in alley chop houses whose fame has gone around the world." He ceased speaking abruptly, for the long lashes had flown upward and she was looking at him steadily.

"I did not know that road monkeys dined at such places," she returned with a queer smile and a slight emphasis upon the obnoxious title. The man flushed, self angry at his slip.

"They don't," he muttered.

"Then you have not always been a road monkey," she breathed as if greatly relieved. "What were you before you became one?"

"Leave off the 'road' and you have your answer." The tinge of sharpness in his reply told

her that the question had annoyed him and her enjoyment grew accordingly. Deliberately she baited him.

"Then I suppose you used to frequent such places in your salad college days before your rich father disowned you with a sixpence because of your reckless eating debts. That is the way it usually happens, you know. Only instead of going west as a cowboy to later become a great cattleman, you came north to become a rich road monkey." Her smile was of the friendliest and her inflections the most innocent, but the taunt in her eyes challenged the impatience that had been behind his last words. He became nettled.

"You have guessed wonderfully. But of course those were freshman days for me and you were preparing for Vassar. I think I remember meeting you. A band of us escaped from our reservation one evening and came over to your town, and by some wonderful coincidence fell in with your bevy. We all took the war path together. The fearful ice cream orgie that followed ruined me."

She nodded in the most matter-of-fact way possible. "Of course. I remember you dis-

tinctly now. You were a great athlete or something or other, and when our joint war party was discovered—goodness how fast you ran.”

“Almost as fast as though I had been chasing a wolf,” he returned maliciously.

She smiled sweetly. “Much faster. Did you run all the way up here?”

He refused to answer, and during the rest of the meal ate with few words uttered, while the girl wondering if she had really wounded him watched him covertly. The meal finished he washed the dishes for her, and as there was no cloth at hand, dried them by turning them upside down over the stove. She was still sitting on the bench before the table and he saw her endeavor to hide a yawn.

“I will get a couple of blankets and sleep here in the cook’s bunk by the stove. You take the bunkhouse and the lantern,” he said. She nodded her approval, admitting that she was tired and arose promptly. Screening the lantern from the wind of the passageway he escorted her to the adjoining building, hung the light upon a peg and gathering up his blankets, stepped back to the entrance. She was standing

by the heater, her back towards him, her soft hair glistening beneath the light as he paused upon the threshold.

"I can only hope that you will sleep soundly. Rap upon the door of the cook shanty should you become alarmed. But of course there can be nothing to alarm you."

She told him that she would and he passed without. "Then we will meet at the breakfast table. Good-night."

"Good-night."

CHAPTER VI

MORNING came, gray morning, with the wind fled into the south but the snow still falling heavily. Barbara was preparing the morning meal from the remnants of the night before when Wilson came into the cook shanty, snow covered, from a short scouting expedition. They breakfasted as they had supped, discussing the situation pro and con. The man summarized conditions.

"It has been snowing like this for eighteen hours and it is now nearly knee-deep on the level, and the Lord only knows its depth where the drifts have formed. Anyway, they have climbed to the eaves of this very house. I might be able to get through the snow as far as Archer by taking my time and picking my route, but I don't believe any woman could last long in the kind of going that is between here and town. So there it is and here we are."

"And just where is 'here'?"

"I don't know exactly, but I have recovered my bearings to a certain extent. I should guess that 'here' is not over five miles from your home as the crow flies. But it would be considerably further along the route one would have to pick to get around things."

"You know the right direction, then, should you decide to start?"

"Approximately. I think I could hit it close enough for all practical purposes. But it might take me all day to make it, and that would leave you alone meanwhile and nearly all to-night while they were coming back after you." The girl lost no time in expressing her views on that subject.

"I would not stay here alone that length of time if the snows were as deep as the deluge. I know I would be safe enough, but the loneliness of it would be unendurable. I would rather flounder through the drifts until I become exhausted, rest for a while and then go on again until I finally reached somewhere. And besides, poor daddy will be nearly insane until he gets me back. We must try and break through."

The man weighed matters upon his mental

scales. It might be days before the searching party, now undoubtedly upon its way, happened to stumble upon this half-forgotten camp far from any direct trail, while as for himself, as able-bodied a man as the woods knew to sit helplessly within doors and wait to be rescued from a snowbank would not only be the superlative of ridiculous, but would make him forever the laughing mark of the woods. Still, the situation had its difficulties. Inasmuch as she had declared that she would not remain behind, he must take her with him. Yet he scarcely saw how he could accomplish that. It all depended upon her strength and stamina.

They finished their meal and arose, Wilson buttoning his mackinaw closely about him and bidding her prepare for the journey, which she did by a slight shortening of her walking skirt and putting on her cap and mittens. Then rolling up the most serviceable of the blankets which he slung over his shoulder and thrusting a piece of meat and a couple of boiled potatoes into his pocket, they plunged waist-deep into drift that lay just beyond the passageway.

Save in narrow areas where the gale howling

down the forest alleyways had swept the snow aside like a stiff broom and left the lower growth exposed, the brush had disappeared entirely, or at best stood with but its tips above the surface like the fingers of a drowning man who clutches at the empty air. Smothering masses of feathery softness had transformed the dark green roof of the forest into a blur of white from which puff balls fell noiselessly. The blacksmith shop, the lowest of the buildings, was but a mound; the clearing a spotless, smooth billowed sea. Wilson, two yards in advance of the girl, plowed a deep trail around the drifts while she, hampered by skirts and inferior length of limbs followed laboriously. When, as often happened, he floundered into a hole he turned about, floundered out again and chose another course, going frequently back to her side to assist her after a fall. It was severe work even for him with his strength and leg reach; for the girl it was next to impossible. Her deep breathings were distinct to his ears, and several times he paused to ask her if she would not stop for a brief rest, but each time she said "No" and courageously struggled on. An hour of uninterrupted wad-

ing passed and he estimated that they had put a mile behind them, when an exclamation from behind caused him to wheel about and he saw that she had again fallen. Instantly he was at her side. But so acute had her exhaustings of breath become that instead of assisting her to her feet he forced her to remain sitting in the snow. And though both were perspiring freely from their exertions as they halted, scarcely a minute had passed in inactivity before the razor-edged air had cut through their clothing and the chill moisture of their skins had set them shivering. He drew the blanket from his shoulders, wrapped it snugly about her, and commanding that she sit still for a while went slowly ahead making a trail. Fifteen minutes later she had caught up with him.

Floundering and wallowing, halting briefly at times that she might regain her breath, they struggled on until noon came with perhaps half the distance covered. But the girl despite her determination and endurance was manifestly walking upon the verge of complete exhaustion. His sympathy for her was great, and that she managed to retain her cheerfulness to the extent that

she did, astonished him. Physically she might collapse and mentally she might despair, yet the smile was almost as ready upon her lips as when they had sat at ease behind the log walls of the camp.

He scooped the snow from a fallen trunk and they seated themselves upon it, and here they ate the chilled lunch and rested for the better part of an hour. The food and respite brought them new strength and a pipeful of tobacco comforted the man mightily, but with dread of the darkness and a long night in the snow upon them they arose and stiffly plowed on. For another hour they made as good speed as they had averaged during the morning, but at the end of that time, although she struggled her bravest, nature began to fail her and the girl lagged until the pace degenerated to little better than a crawl. At three o'clock, and but a moment after she had once more flatly refused to either pause or permit him to assist her, she sank limply in her tracks without a sound, her head pillowed upon the snow. Wilson had long feared that this minute would come, and now was beside her almost before she struck the yielding mass.

He kneeled and rested her head in the crook of his elbow. Her eyes were half closed, her breath coming in gasps and her bosom heaving spasmodically. He withdrew the arm that supported her and her head toppled against his breast where she lay, utterly spent, nearly unconscious and incapable of other than involuntary movement. He drew the blanket close around her, as he had done earlier in the day, and making her as comfortable as he could scanned the silent, trackless forest that lay in front of him. He did not think that it could be more than a mile to her house, but she would not be capable of further exertion for hours—perhaps days—and the early darkness was already beginning to gather. To leave her alone in the snow while he went on, trusting to chance to get back to her before she froze was not to be thought of twice; while to carry her the distance that lay between where he kneeled and Archer would be an almost Herculean feat under the conditions that existed, yet, either he must do it or else, building a fire, watch over her through the fifteen hours intervening until morning. And to exposure like that he dared not risk her in her exhausted state.

Most of all things she needed food, hot drinks, the warmth and comfort of a bed, and these he decided she should have if human effort could take her to them. Could he have slung her over his back after the manner of an Indian woman carrying a papoose his labor would have been lightened a half, but he had no means of doing that, so he raised her in his arms and started on.

At the end of two hundred yards she opened her eyes and feebly begged to be allowed to make her own way, and in order to humor her and convince her of the folly of the request he placed her upon her feet. Instantly her strengthless limbs gave way and only his arm about her waist prevented her from falling. In this position he held her while he took a moment's breathing spell, after which he raised her and despite her protesting struggles carried her on, seeing that she had fallen asleep in the midst of her assurances that she was now able to walk again. He did not succeed in getting quite as far this time as upon the first effort. The clutch of the snow was beginning to tell upon him and the dead weight of her body tugged at his arms unceasingly. A hundred and fifty wading steps he

made and then was forced to lay her gently upon the snow until returning breath and strength promised him brief aid again. So on and on in steadily diminishing stages, his breath labored and painful, his knees trembling and his arms threatening to leave their sockets beneath the numbing strain, Wilson toiled as gamely as he had long ago in that never-to-be-forgotten run. Time and again despair was upon him when after a breathing spell he stumbled about in feeble effort to raise her, yet each time the more strongly recurring fear of a night in the snow, coupled with the thought of her own dauntless courage that had driven her on until unconsciousness came, nerved his benumbed muscles and brought him eventual success. He had never seen a woman of her courage before; had never admired one half as much. And while her beauty was beyond all controversy, it was fully matched by her indomitable courage and cheerfulness under circumstances when many a man would have laid down beaten to whimpering non-resistance. Well he knew how miserable she had been when he had found her at nightfall roosting in the tree-top with the bitter cold of darkness upon her

and the gaunt brutes sniffing at her from so close at hand. Yet her first utterance upon seeing him was a laugh forced from between teeth that chattered with cold and fear. Then, too, their situation in the deserted camp had been trying to her—would have been to any woman of refinement—yet she had turned it into a jest, and had carried the jest through to the end without faltering. And last of all her struggle through the snow that very day! Well, she had taught him a lesson which he would always remember, for he, too, would hereafter meet the inevitable with better grace. Why not repentance with a smile as well as with a frown? Blessed be she for her teachings.

The red sun sinking behind a ridge left him leaning against a tree with his right arm hooked around it for support as his left encircled his burden. He had done his best, but the darkness was but a matter of minutes and the forest seemed as endless as at the beginning. He drew off his mittens and felt of her cheeks and wrists. They were cold and he sat down at once and began chafing them as he gazed at the unutterable weariness of her face with its sweeping lashes

now resting upon her cheeks. Forgetful of his own almost overwhelming weariness his heart went out to her in deepest sympathy. "Poor girl," was his thought. "How some man will long for you one of these days. How he will strive for you, and if he wins—gods! What a wife he will get."

The chafings warmed her wrists and he looked around in a last survey. It was too dark for him to carry her any distance further, yet could he reach the other side of the ridge upon which they now stood they would be sheltered from the north wind and there he would make his night fire. Once more he tried to lift her but his legs seemed to have frozen stiff in his brief interval of kneeling and he had to exert all his strength to arise alone. And at the thought of how short the distance was to a more sheltered place and how little strength it would take to bear her there, a feeling almost of savagery arose within him at his impotence. "I'll make it if it kills me," he muttered, and pulling her up almost hand over hand he got her free of the snow. Then like a drunken man he went staggering on in his last effort of the day. And then as he

reached the summit, the trees opened before him as though there was no such thing as a forest upon earth and the half dozen lights of Archer twinkled close before his eyes.

Five minutes later a man, done to his last rod and minute, dropped a heavily sleeping woman into a chair and threw himself at full length upon the counter before the staring eyes of the storekeeper. And while the latter was still rushing excitedly about in a flurry of indecision the door was flung open and Findlay, closely followed by half a dozen men, entered from a long, bootless day among the drifts; weary beyond telling but calling for lanterns that the search might be renewed. The jaws of the logger were set like the jaws of a trap; his face stamped with mental agony, his eyes mechanically flicking the store as all day they had flicked the snow mounds, horror-filled lest they should find that for which they searched; agonized lest they should not. Half way down the aisle he saw the girl and stared at her for an instant; then with a hoarse shout sprang forward and took her face between his palms. Finding it warm he lifted her as though she had been a child and broke into a wild

waltz about the room as he hugged her to him. Her eyelids lifted heavily and at the sight of the whiskered face above her she smiled contentedly as with one hand wandering upward she reached and patted the cheek. Her words came drowsily.

“Take me home and let me sleep. I’m awfully tired, and besides—” her eyes slowly turned to Wilson and seemed to be laughing at him—“besides I’ve been hugged enough for one day, daddy.”

CHAPTER VII

THROUGH the week following the Christmas carousal and the heavy fall of snow the crew of Camp 5 toiled mightily. As if in penance for their day of strenuous relaxation the complex-muscled, simple-minded sons of the forest daily worked miracles of endurance. The camp was buried to its eaves and the glistening ice road lay buried half a fathom deep. Twenty-four lunging horses fought their way to Archer in the van of the first hastily constructed snow boat, a stanch craft with a "V" shaped nose heavily ballasted with logs to give it draught, and which plunged through the snow billows leaving behind it a broad, foam-like wake. A score of shovelers floundered ahead of it, digging the horses out of the depths when the course grew too rough, or leaping aboard the craft for a ride when the sailing was fair and the boat riding easily. The trip although only eight miles in length used up an eighteen-hour day, but the plow had left

a deep trench behind it and the worst part of the job ended with the first journey. Then the crew that had accompanied the snow boat ate and slept for half a dozen hours in Archer, after which they navigated the rough craft back again. The second round trip left the road in a usable condition. Wilson, who in the meantime had returned to the camp and his ax, was half the time waist deep as he swamped.

But six days and nights of work like this found the camp in smooth running order again. The snow settled quite a bit of its own accord, the skidways and tote roads became packed and solid and six or seven o'clock was once more the standard hour for ending the day's toil. Then New Year's day came, and although technically recognized as a holiday it found the men in the woods working practically as usual. But they knocked off early that afternoon and were gathered around the heater not long after the first dusk of evening. The shortness of the day's labor had left them unusually surcharged with vitality, and being fresh physically their tongues moved with unwonted alacrity. For a time shop talk prevailed, then a chance remark caught each

ear and straight as a weathercock points into the wind the conversation was directed to pure romance. For the woodsman in his lighter moods is a true raconteur and a humorist of no mean ability. Of a sudden Winnipeg plunged into the midst of the strange adventures of a cousin of his upon the latter's first arrival in the north woods.

"My couzeen he hear a woodpeckair up a tree mek a grand noise and he say to me, 'Pete, what is it she'll go r-r-rickety talk up ze tree?'"

"'Gar,' say I. 'Zat is ze gret American woodpeckair.'"

"'Ze gret American woodpeckair,' he say. 'Well, ba' Cras! She got a dam hard nose.'"

Were wolves and loup garous followed in howling chorus. Devil bats and rackaree bobs were conjured forth until the listeners swore they could hear the whistle of wings and the scratch of claws. Imps and devils did their turns and vanished, and the plain skeleton—that veritable backbone of all that is supernatural took his place in the center of the circle. He was introduced by "Sourdough" Casey, now but a year returned from the Alaskan snows, who spat re-

flectively into the distance as he made response to a question.

"Did I iver see a ghost? Wan. But it was not untill after he was dead. Down in Newfoundland where I was born they was as thick as fleas on a dog; yit divil a ghost did I iver lay eyes upon until wan year ago come this very minnit. 'Twas while Brady and me was shackin' out Seminow way in an ould hut by an abandoned shaft, and without a human bein' within twinty miles of us savin' two Frinchmin what was prospectin' about a mile beyont. Wan avenin' Brady an' me goes over and makes a party call on thim. They was frindly and dacent enough in a Frinchmin's way.

"Says Brady as we was about lavin': 'Come over, byes, an' see us nixt Soonday. We kape house in thot ould shack by the shaft, the bottum of which is fild with brush. 'Tis an ilegant shack with rale boards on the floor an' a chimney like a steeple.' Mooch to our surprise they but rowlt their eyes an' backed away from us like scairt horses.

"'An' what's the matter with thim dagoes?' wants to know Brady. 'It's scairt they be of us,

but what the sin can it be—barrin' your landscape? Lit's be after askin' the dom pagins.' So we begin palaverin'.

"Well, by dint of much loud talkin' in the sign language we found out about ut. Wan year before two fellys had lived in thot silfsame shack, an' wan night somethin' happened—a screamin' an' hollerin' of blackmail an' bloody murder. So the nixt mornin' over wint some fellys who was campin' near to find out the meanin' of sich conduct. Divil a sowl was in the camp, but there was plinty of fresh blood dried on the floor an' the ground was trampled outrajus. Thin they followed up the tracks an' there at the bottum of the shaft was the body of wan of thim, dead beyont all savin', his throat cut most reckless. So they threw brush down to cover him an' took after the other felly. Niver did they cotech him."

"How about the ghost?" broke in Sturgeon Bay as Sourdough stopped to relight his pipe. The latter nodded.

"Yis, the ghost! He will appear prisently. So Brady and me kapes on askin' but they only humped their shoulders and wint away, lavin'

us. Off we goes full of wondermint. ‘’Tis a banshee they be fearin’,’ says I, ‘an I’ll not be timplin’ the divil by stayin’ in thot shack longer.’ But Brady only kapes on thinkin’ an’ we wint to bed. Along in the shank of the avenin’ he wakes me up with his elbow: ‘Hist,’ says he, ‘now listin.’

“An’ there in the darkness of the shack I could hear somewan walkin’. The boards cracked under his feet an’ ivery now and thin he would heave a sigh like a steam ingine.

“‘Avaunt, ye bog-trotter,’ yells Brady, throwin’ his boot through the darkness. An’ at that there was a shriek that lifted us clane onto the floor wherr we stood shakin’ and with our hair risin’ like the quills on a porky. Thin we struck a light, but niver a thing could we see that was not what it should be. But over towards the ould shaft somethin’ was wailin’ an’ we wint back to bed and awaited devilepments.

“But all was paceful as Palm Soonday until the nixt night. I was sleepin’ with wan eye opin an’ I knew Brady was awake because he wasn’t snorin’. Everythin’ was as still as a cimitery, when all at once the floor began creak-

in' an' thin comes a groan that curdled me systim. 'Lit's pray,' I whispers to Brady as I crossed myself. 'I disremimber the openin' words of a prayer, but you start it off an' I'll join in the chorus.' But Brady only chuckled.

"'Stop your chucklin' you blasphemous gorilla,' says I. 'Shame be upon you for such disrespect in the prisence of the departed.' Then Brady rolls over and faces me.

"'Hould your horses for a minit an' the beggar will have somethin' to groan over. I set a wolf trap for him, bad luck to the sleep-walkin' boggy,' he breathes in my ear. An' the words was barely out from his teeth than there was a snap an' a scream that made my skin feel like a nutmeg grater. Around the shack somethin' was floundèrin' and screamin', but the nixt minute it had got outside and we heard it clatterin' off into the distance. Thin up jumps Brady, grabs a lantern and follows the racket with me stumblin' along after with the sweat poppin' from my forehead like dew on a lily.

"Straight up to the mouth of the shaft the sounds led us and thin all was silence. 'I got him all right, an' I'll have him on exhibition to-

morry,' grins Brady. An' the nixt mornin' I lowers him down the shaft with a rope and he throws the brush aside. An' there under ut was the skileton of a man with a wolf trap still tight to his ankle. 'Twas a most unusual experience."

The silence fell and through the smoke Wilson watched them as they puffed at their pipes stolidly. There was no comment, no smile, not the glance of an eye to betoken the slightest discredit of the story. A minute passed and then Sourdough turned upon the watcher.

" 'Tis yoursilf we would hear from nixt, sor," he announced with wheedling politeness. "An' small doubt but your words will be most interestin'." The circle stirred expectantly. Just who this man of silence was they had not been able to make up their minds, but now he was to address them. Certainly he was no woodsman, and it had been this same Sourdough who had been the most persistent in demanding, "Thin what the divil is he?" As a lumberman he ranked far beneath them, and they had ever been upon the alert to peer beneath his cloak of silence to see what manner of man might be concealed thereunder. Externally they rated him as their

inferior, but as to his unrevealed possibilities they had reserved judgment. That was because silence is ever full of potentialities.

As for Wilson he now found himself squarely cornered. To confess that he had nothing to tell; that he had had no experiences and could invent none worth listening to would be to their minds an open confession of his mental vacuity; whereat the silence which they had theretofore held in mild respect would thereafter be regarded as merely the shroud of stupidity. He knew very well that he could not romance up to their standard, yet while he was not able to serve them with a pure lie garbed as truth he might at least serve them with pure truth dressed as a lie; a wonderful truth, an astonishing, marvelous truth infinitely beyond their primitive comprehensions. Thinking rapidly he happened to recall the weird experience of the Siberian explorers who found buried in the ice of a thousand generations the frozen body of a mammoth, exhumed it, thawed the prehistoric flesh before their fires and fed the dead tissue of thousands of years, still quick with life-giving properties, to their half famished dogs. Nothing in the

wildest flights of fiction could sound more unreal to these crude minds than this elementary simple scientific truth—the living of to-day feeding upon flesh that had walked the earth thousands of years before the great Nazarene had given the earth a new religion; before the first stone was hewn for sphinx or pyramids; before the Egyptians first emerged from the mists of the past upon the banks of the Nile and the Ganges—in a past as unfathomable as the future. The incident had impressed his mind greatly as he read it, and he was now able to tell it graphically and with a wealth of detail, yes, even to elaborate it a trifle at times as he puffed slowly at his pipe between sentences. And as he spoke their attention grew and grew until their tobacco ceased to burn and wide-eyed and open-mouthed they hemmed him about in an ear-strained circle. He finished, knocked the “heel” from his briar and arising with deliberation passed out into the moonlight, closing the door after him. For a moment following his departure all within the bunkhouse was as quiet as the grave, then to his ears came the voice of Sourdough, awe stricken, almost reverent.

“An ilephant in cold storage for twinty thousand years! An’ they ate his meat like ’twas tinderloin. Niver before did I hear such a liar.”

CHAPTER VIII

SIX O'CLOCK the next morning found Wilson, ax on shoulder, striding along the trail that led to the river. With the whining saws ever eating deeper into the forest and leaving behind them day after day more scores of felled trunks, new skidding roads must be constantly constructed. He was now to work upon one that led to a rollway down which the logs were to be tumbled. Where the banks of the stream were low, the logs were piled at the water's edge where a few heaves from a cant-hook would send them into the current, but where the shores towered they were accumulated at the verge of an incline. Back in the woods he heard the commands of a top-loader to the ground-men as the logs were hauled to the pile on skids, where they were wrapped about by a log chain and then by means of a primitive, sled-mounted derrick swung from the skid by horse power to the top of the pile. It was fast work and dangerous, this swinging

of ponderous tree trunks bodily through the air, poising them delicately upon the crest of the top log and then nesting them snugly with cant-hook and peavy, and grewsome accidents were of not infrequent occurrence. For though your true loader is as keen-eyed and sure-footed as a mountain goat, yet the day sometimes comes when a foot slips, a working mate blunders or a well-trained horse miscalculates and then like as not there is a mangled body lying in the snow. Sharply the sounds of the toiling crew penetrated the frost-bitten air, the warning call of the skyman to his partners below, their grunted responses and the rattle of chains. Then suddenly there came a dull rumble and a warning yell that was followed by an ominous silence. Halted in his tracks by the dull roar and ensuing quiet Wilson stood with eyes peering deep into the forest where he knew in all probability another grim tragedy had taken place. He strained his ears for another sound which would give him the exact location of the happening.

For a space the stillness was absolute, seeming accentuated by the sudden hushing of the cries as the stillness of a room seems to be em-

phasized by the instantaneous stopping of a loudly ticking clock. Then he heard a combined groan and curse, and throwing his ax aside he went running to whence the voice sounded. A moment later he arrived at the spot.

Sturgeon Bay was lying in the snow, white of face and grimacing with pain but swearing at his mates without cessation. A heavy log pinned his leg to the ground and his escape from death had been narrow. But although he hurried his utmost, before Wilson could lend a hand the rapidly working woodsmen had refastened the logging chain and the stout horses once more lurched forward and swung the trunk into the air where it swayed above its victim. Then they grasped the fallen man and dragged him to a place of safety where they began with rough solicitude to examine the injured limb. It was a bad fracture, compound, comminuted, the splintered bones projecting through the flesh beneath the knee. The victim bolstered up by the knee of Pete Mullet, watched their crude diagnosis as he called down picturesque misfortunes upon the heads of the authors of the accident. Wilson was holding the injured leg in position

as best he could while the others tightly bandaged it with strips torn from their clothing, and now he asked incidentally how it had happened. Sturgeon Bay's reply was pregnant with a great disgust.

"I was the skyman and that——Canuck cant-hook Jack below was heaving up a top log. I yelled to him to throw the Saginaw into her, but instead of that the pea-cracking boon skipper St. Croixed her and she bucked up and cracked off one of my stems."

They grinned in the midst of their ministrings, abusing the patient in kind, and having finished wrapping the leg quickly made a rude stretcher of saplings and bore him away. The swamper watched them as they disappeared campward, the maledictions of Sturgeon Bay coming back to his ears long after the boughs had screened him, then returned to his thrown-aside tool. The accident had depressed him more than a little. There had been something in the attitude of the woodsman as he had lain in the snow that had been grewsomely suggestive of the way Grayford had fallen, and not since the few days following that tragedy had he been

so soul weary. And that Barbara Findlay had come into his life, radiant and unforgettable, he regarded as an additional misfortune. That he admired her more than any other woman he had ever known; that of late he had thought of her more than all other things combined, and that her presence had quickened his pulse as no other presence ever had, were matters of which he could not but take cognizance in his moments of introspection. Yet that he, a hiding criminal, should become more than idly interested in any woman would be to compound folly with crime and add fresh coals of suffering to those already heaped upon him. To fall in love—nothing could be more impossible. Doggedly he trudged on.

He was walking along a beaten path with his eyes glued upon the trail and his rubbered feet falling almost noiselessly. A fallen log lay before him and he swung himself upon it with the involuntary stealth of those who walk alone in the empty halls of silent places. Happening to glance a trifle further ahead he abruptly ceased all movement. A dozen yards away a large animal lay sleeping in the snow, the silvery gray

coat harmonizing almost perfectly with the bed upon which it lay and the broad antlers uprising in a pronged crescent. Neither sound nor scent had betrayed the advancing man and the buck slept on unconscious, fairly within ax hurl. There was a fresh wound as though made by sharp fangs upon his flank, and the soundness of his sleep betokened hard running and exhaustion not many hours past.

"Good morning," called Wilson from his perch.

With a snort the buck raised his head and forequarters, and with front legs spread far apart and stiffly braced, sat for a moment in strange awkwardness as he stared uncomprehendingly at the one who had aroused him from his dreams. Then he arose upon all fours, wheeled and began leaping high in the air with the easy spring of a bounding rubber ball. And so slow, so effortless and so rhythmic were his motions that the watching man thought he but sprang idly up and down in one spot until his rapidly diminishing size told him that those seemingly purposeless leaps were in reality tremendous forward bounds that sent the great silvery-gray body

fairly whistling through space. For a hundred yards he ran straight away, then angling from the trail cleared a fallen top the height of a man's head with half a yard to spare between his knees and the topmost branch, vanishing like a gray specter in the brush. It was a display of running and vaulting incomparable, and the sight of it aroused the watcher's admiration hugely.

"Good-by and good luck to you, old man," he called into the emptiness where the deer had been a moment before. "May you always be able to show your enemies as clean a pair of heels as you do your friends." He leaped from the log and went on down the trail as he marveled at the distance that lay between the imprints of the hoofs.

Throughout that day Wilson worked even harder than usual. Despite all efforts to lighten them, his spirits remained leaden and he sought by sheer violence of exertion to banish the dreary mental pictures that insisted upon arising before him. Five o'clock came with the gray of mid-winter twilight close upon it, heavy clouds blurring the sky and a shifting wind that awoke the

voices of the firs. Across the river over on the hardwood ridge the wolves had been in full cry for an hour past, their voices now receding, now approaching as though they ran some game that circled wide and fast. The tumult was steadily growing in volume now, eager and sharp, leading straight towards him, and he rested on his ax as he fastened his eyes on the river upon which it seemed each moment the yelling pack must burst into full sight. An instant later a magnificent buck shot out of the forest onto the snowspread ice, a great silver-gray fellow with a fresh scar upon his flank, and who taking to the level surface ran diagonally across towards where the man stood. And scarcely was he well clear of the cover than a full score of gaunt brutes burst into sight on the other side and went leaping across the ice in full chorus.

For a moment the swamper's heart stood still as he recognized the grand brute as the one of the morning whom he had prayed might ever show his enemies clean heels. But no longer the great one ran with the effortless grace of a bounding rubber ball, but heavily and doggedly—as the gazing man had run the last mile of

his great race. And now fairly in the middle of the river, with his lolling foes hemming him close about and one red-tongued brute leaping back and forth before his nose, the buck spun about. Softly gossiping winds had whispered to the pack that he was near and the ever tell-tale snow had led them to the covert where he had hid. Ill luck had led him into a pit where a fall had lamed him, and now the remorseless ruler of the wilderness, whose decree has ever been that no wild thing shall die a natural death, stood over him thumbs down. Knowing that he was about to die the buck lowered his antlers and charged, and Wilson cheered him on with a wild yell as he saw a howling form go down before the prongs and knife-like hoofs of the dying warrior. But he was hopelessly outnumbered and exhausted, while the cunning ones that had run him in relays were fresh and famishing. Struggling bravely he went down, buried beneath them, and in a moment more his sufferings were over. Dusk crept from out of the woods and threw its first fold over the tragedy of the river, and the man turned campward and left the snarling pack muzzle deep in the

warm blood that had the moment before surged so strongly through the perfect form of their quarry.

But it was a day of accidents and bloodshed and he was not done with it yet. Back in camp he learned of another disaster. Jimmy Hard Boots, partner of Big Ben, had had his ribs staved in by the back kick of a tree and was already being conveyed to the railway upon a sled. That night for the first time during the season the scaler's figures on the bucking board, where the day's cut of the rival crews was chalked in all men's view, showed that another crew had done greater wonders since morning than had Big Ben's. And glooming over the misfortune to his partner, and stung by the humiliation of being outdone in his labors, that giant sat in a corner without a word spoken the whole evening through.

It was a day that Wilson was glad to see pass forever and he crawled into his blankets immediately after supper. Yet in one way it brought its compensation. For out of it grew an incident deemed remarkable even among the mighty deeds of the giants of the snows.

CHAPTER IX

HE came squeaking over the surface, his broad, hide-interlaced footgear stringing the blurred signature of the snowshoe behind him. Up the steep bank of the stream he zig-zagged his way amongst the dark firs and pale birches until he reached the hardwood of the ridge top, and there paused for a brief inspection. To his left lay the steep plunge of the south side of the hill, ending in a cypress swamp choked with the white groves of its buried dead; back of him the dark fringed river, glimmering unspotted in the moonlight; before him the endless forest that stretched away and away until it sickened and died at the edge of the polar circle. Hitching his pack higher on his shoulders and shaping his course so that the moon shone full in his face, he went shuffling along the spine of the ridge with the swinging gait of a caribou.

For nearly a mile he traveled rapidly, then halted. Just before him the shoulder of the hill

fell sharply away, and in the hollow below half a dozen low log structures squatted with yellow fans of light streaming from the narrow windows across the snow. He descended and plunged among them. From the first structure came the munchings and stampings of many horses, from the next the shrill whistle of the still toiling cookee, from the third and largest, the hum of many voices. Hesitating for but an instant before the door he jerked the latch up and stepped within.

The buzz of the voices instantly ceased and through the smoke-fog three score pairs of eyes gazed at him with the unwinking frankness of men who compliment each other with curses, and whose idea of a mild reproof is a blow that does not permanently disable. In the center of the room a heater was roaring and the humid smell of rapidly drying garments was strong in his nose. Unwinkingly he returned their stare until at last the voice of Winnipeg broke the silence.

“Injun, by Gar!”

In an instant pandemonium arose. From deacon bench, bunk and stool arose the tolling

sentences of a Swede, the quick retort of a Celt and the burr of a Canuck, until Flint striding from out of the gray gloom stood before the visitor. "What's the trouble, Injun?" he demanded. Impassively the other answered him.

"No trouble 'tall. Cold in woods. Me stay here all night, mebbysso."

With a brief nod the walking boss turned away and the red man, kicking his feet from his snowshoes, threw his pack upon an empty bunk and seated himself alone in a corner. For it is the unwritten law of the north woods that whoever comes into camp from off the snows may eat, sleep and rest there from sun to sun without money and without price, be his skin white, black or red. And neither should he, holding his peace, have questions asked of him the answering of which might cause embarrassment. Gradually the hum of the voices sank into a drone and the drone into a silence as the wearied toilers cast off their outer clothing and crawled into their bunks for the deep sleep which should leave them giants refreshed for the giants' work of the morrow, the last intelligible sound being the drowsy

query of Sourdough whose bunk was next to the door.

"An' Swanson? Did ye wind up thot dom thermometer?"

Scarcely, so it seemed to them, had the hands of the tiny clock had time to crawl an inch than the long drawn call of the chore boy ringing in their ears brought them to the floor where they dressed in a dozen breaths and then filed through the door to the long breakfast tables. And the Indian following closely in their steps ate as the white men did, silently, hugely, then stepped into the open air without. The sky was leaden and the air bitterly cold, while upon his head and shoulders frozen particles of snow rattled like fine sifted sands. Out of the morning's gray Flint came striding and the guest let fall a detaining hand upon the white man's sleeve as the latter passed. The boss whirled upon him impatiently.

"What do you want?"

"Me go to work now."

"What can you do?"

"Saw down tree like loup garou * devil."

* Pronounced "Loo-garoo," a Werewolf.

Critically Flint surveyed him up and down, through and across, with eyes long accustomed to judge of the brawn of man or beast, noting the set of the thick neck, on the powerful shoulders, the depth of the chest and the bowed, muscled legs. "Looks fit, but I never saw an Injun yet that could hold up his end with a good white man," he thought, and at another time would have given a curt negative and gone his way. But since the accident to Jimmy Hard Boots, Big Ben had been in a black sulk because of the feebleness of his new sawing partner, and Flint, eager to humor the giant as the best sawyer in the woods, was at his wits' end to find him a fitting mate. It is a bitter thing for a man to see a fiercely-won and long-gloried-in championship wrested from him, and Big Ben's fame had been sung in every lumber camp, smoky dance hall and log saloon of the pineries. Yet that was just what this mighty sawyer was witnessing now, for Lebeau and Amereaux, greatly heartened by the disabling of Jimmy, were driving their whining ribbon of steel back and forth with the frenzy of whipped devils, and the nightly scores upon the bucking board were

as wormwood and gall to the long victorious Ben. With all this in mind Flint pondered while one might have counted ten, then jerked out his answer. "Come with me." Quickly he turned away, the Indian stepping in his tracks.

Over the summit of the hill a black mass crawled, seemed to poise for an instant on the apex and then, tilting, came thundering down upon them. A leap to one side and they were in safety among the brush. The next moment a huge swaying load roared past, the teamster as tense and alert as a charioteer of Rome as with wild yells he urged the leaping beasts on. Flint, his mouth bound shut by tight lines, watched the mass until with a lurch to the side it ground around a curve and disappeared. Then he faced his companion.

"Lost two horses and a man on that devil's slide last winter. Straw got iced over in the night and the sled raced like that one just now. Horses slipped and went down and the driver was yanked off. Five thousand feet of logs went over them in the tenth of a second. You can imagine the shape they were in when we

gathered them up. But the stuff has to go down all the same." Grimmer of countenance than he had been the moment before he once more led the way up the hill.

Big Ben accepted his new mate with a scowl of disapproval. "Injun or white man, Swede or Canuck is all the same to me so long as he can do the work," he growled. "But whoever he may be I'll make him sweat blood before three hours have come and gone. Hear that, you savage? I'm going to tame you."

"Mebbyso."

"Then take hold of that saw." Despite the bitterness of the air Big Ben threw his heavy blanket coat aside and stood before them frowning and huge in the first daylight as the Indian silently picked up his end of the thin blade. And Flint, seeing the light of rivalry that already burned in their eyes left them with a "go to it" and an inward grin. For rivalry between a pair like this meant many logs cut for the drive to come, and many logs for the drive meant an increase of wages for the foreman.

Back and forth, back and forth they swayed until the red sawdust spurted in streams from

the heart of the wounded tree. Deftly the wedge was driven, the final ax cut made and far up in the air the head of the Norway nodded. Then with a sickened shudder, a groan and a drunken sway it roared down through the branches of its lesser kind, stripping them as by a thunderbolt, hurling the dismembered limbs javelin-like through the air, then with a rebounding back leap and the rending of tough fibers lay inert at full length upon the snow. From the place of safety where they had withdrawn at the beginning of the downrush Big Ben and his dark partner emerged to seek another victim.

But though he worked with more than his usual might through the day, when night came and they wended their way campward the white man was forced to inwardly confess that his new partner had driven him as no man ever had before. But the figures upon the board that night told another tale, the old familiar ones of Big Ben and his mate leading in the cut of the day, and for the first time since the passing of Jimmy Hard Boots the voices of the Frenchmen were subdued. But instead of rejoicing that he had

again found a partner against whom he could pit his full strength to the vanquishment of his rivals, petty jealousy and selfish rage filled Big Ben's soul that another man dared be as mighty as himself. However, he would teach him his lesson yet. To-morrow he would drive him until the world swam in a sea of blood, and yet on through that sea of blood to a sea of night where all things spun giddily and the roar of cataracts filled his ears. And then having driven him to a lay-down in the snow and taught him his place, he would ease up on him a bit and together they would overhaul the spurting Frenchmen or leave their own skins hanging in the woods. Comforted somewhat by thoughts like these he crept early to bed for the long slumber which would bring him triumph on the morrow.

The moon sailed high and the camp lay hushed in death-like slumber. From out of a berth a form came creeping and stealthily opening the door stepped out into the moonlight of the clearing. Long it stood there in the stinging cold, intense, snuffing the air, listening, its eyes bent steadily upon the north. And though the

watcher knew it not, at this same moment half a dozen leagues further on towards the pole star a young Indian woman from her knees was praying that O-no-ka, the guardian spirit of lovers, might again guide her steps to the lost trail of her husband. For unless she could find him and by throwing herself before him gain forgiveness for her hot words and senseless jealousy, then the gaunt wolf that had followed her for so many weary miles might do his worst, for his worst was better than the lone tepee far back upon the turtle waters.

Six o'clock coming again found Big Ben stripped to his shirt sleeves upon the hillside and scowling at the man whom he had sworn should this day fall gasping before him in the darkness of departing senses and the bitterness of defeat. With an expressionless face the swarthy one picked up one end of the shining steel band and the long finish fight was on. And although Big Ben had done Trojan labors on the day before, his previous efforts were but child's play beside his struggles now as he sought to wear down the silent man whose black eyes ever gazed

deep into his own from the far end of the rushing saw. Three o'clock found the giant gasping for breath and staggering as he sought another tree, and with defeat grinning at him through a dizzy world that swam in a sea of blood he gritted his teeth as he settled himself for his last great effort. An hour later Flint, who happened to be passing, leaped forward with a shout, for Big Ben tottering like a pine dropped his arms and fell forward upon his face in a shapeless mass upon the sawdust-littered snow. The Indian dropping the saw staggered to a nearby trunk and sat down upon it, covering his face with his hands.

Like a forest fire the news swept the camp. Big Ben, the idolized, the invincible, the champion sawyer of the world had been whipped, done up, beaten to a lay-down—and by an Indian! Wonders would never cease. The loggers scowled and swore when they heard the news. But there was one consolation back of it all. There would be a fight worth going miles to witness.

And that night in camp the challenge was hurled. Big Ben striding before his conqueror

glared fiercely upon him. "You——. I'll break every bone in your carcass." With a grunt and a shrug of the shoulders the cold answer came.

"Mebbyso."

"When will you fight?"

"No care. Sunday good 'nuf day for me."

This was Friday night and the time set was not unreasonably distant, and the white man lurched away with an angry growl. For the first time during the season silence that night held the camp, the ominous silence which foreshadows Titanic contests and deeds of blood when lesser men are awed by the very contemplation of the struggle to come. Into their bunks they went a full half hour earlier than was their wont, but no sooner had their breathing grown regular and deep than a dark form once more came creeping forth to stand erect in the moonlight without. And as it stood and listened, there came to its ear a faint quavering howl that caused the listener to start as though stung by a lash. Then passing to the wall of the bunkhouse he took from the logs a pair of snowshoes, swiftly adjusted them and with head and shoulders held

low went swinging into the blackness of the forest along his half-obliterated trail of two nights before.

Kenny, a hostler, saw him as he vanished among the shadows and hurried to the bunk-house with the news. "The Injun has pucked, skipped out, dead scairt to fight," said he disgustedly. And Big Ben, hearing the words, sat up in his bunk and roared in his disappointment and rage.

Back along the spine of the ridge the runaway sped until he reached the summit, then slid and zig-zagged down the steep descent until the glistening incline was beneath his feet. A mile ahead of him was a promontory, low and heavily wooded, lying like some monster across his way, and presently rounding it he stopped with an unintelligible grunt and a screening of his eyes from the white glare. For a hundred yards ahead of him there lay upon the shimmering way a black object where no black object should have been. With lynx-like quickness he approached it, bent over it and then fell upon his knees beside it as his hand darting beneath the enshrouding blankets sought the bosom to see

if the heart still throbbed. Lightning quick he recoiled, stared, then bent still closer. For hugged to the breast of the black-eyed senseless woman was a tiny, helpless thing that shivered and mewed in the cut of the zero air and he stared at it uncomprehendingly. Then with a swift sweep of his arm he wrapped the blanket closely once more.

"Live," he gasped as he swung his burden upward. "Live, and I will always work and hunt for you. And may O-no-ka lend me his strength once more, for the way is long and I must travel swiftly." Bent like a horse-shoe beneath his burden he shambled across the ice, floundered up the hillside, reeled along the ridge as Wilson had done, burst open the door and fell at full length upon the floor of the bunkhouse.

Bewildered and rubbing their blurred eyes the crew sat up in their bunks as they stared at the gasping form as he lay beside his burden. Then one by one they came crawling from their blankets and bent over them. Little was said, but muscle-knotted arms laid them on a bunk and hard palms chafed the woman's wrists with rough tenderness as they gazed at the marvel. The

girl's eyes opened and for a moment she stared about uncomprehendingly, then her eyes fell upon the heavily breathing form by her side, and with a cry she threw herself upon it. The man sat up.

"Your tongue was long and my temper short, yet you are my squaw and our trails should run side by side," he said as his hand closed over hers. "There was no war between us and it is the wish of O-no-ka that we be not parted. One tepee is big enough for both of us and one blanket shall cover us when we are old."

Big Ben arose to his feet and stood glowering upon the circle. "That Injun is the best man in the woods and I'd like to hear someone say different," he said threateningly. "He is the only man that ever beat me, but by the eternal him and me are going to saw them Canadians out of their hides before the winter is over. Shake hands, partner."

CHAPTER X

FINDLAY came jingling into camp behind a pair of half-galloping broncos, fur-coated to his heels, and Wilson saw him and Flint talking earnestly together in front of the office. Presently they signaled him and he went to where they stood, wondering what was in store for him. The camp owner took the swamper's hand with the grip of a blacksmith and then told what had brought him there, in about a dozen words.

"Our bookkeeper at Archer was holed-up in town. Want the opening?"

The new woodsman whistled softly. "Think I'm big enough to fill it?" he asked somewhat dubiously.

"You'll crowd it. Anybody can tell in five minutes that you've got brains, and after the way you stuck to your feet when you toted my girl in, your grit ain't a matter of speculation. The bookkeeping is easy the way it has been handled heretofore, and anybody with a head

on him can make it easier yet. I'll hold on to you until you get so you can ride your own log, and after that it will be as simple as Simon. You'll have a little cave of your own to sleep in over the store and I'll sky your time-check to fifty dollars a month. Want it?"

Wilson leaned back against the logs and gazed thoughtfully at his feet. The work that he was now doing was a strong man's work and despite the long hours, the severity of the toil and the occasional hardships he had grown to rather enjoy it than otherwise. The mysterious enchantress of the woods had thrown her first mesh about him. Under these great trees he had been more at peace than he could hope to be elsewhere. From the chilled wine of the north he had drawn deep draughts which had flushed his cheeks and sent the blood tingling through his veins like the wine made by man, yet unlike the wine of man it had brought him the flush of health instead of the flush of fever, and had left his head as clear as a bell. It had been here in this wilderness that he had become filled with an abhorrence unspeakable for his follies of the past, rejoicing silently as he had

felt his swelling muscle drive the ax to the eye in solid wood, and it was here that he had also grown stronger of heart, stronger of hope, stronger in faith. And now the thought of bartering all this free play of his body for work that a frail woman might do as well or better than he could was the antonym of tempting. Still, it was a distinct advance in the social and financial scale, and socially and financially he now stood almost upon the bottom. Looking at it from that angle it was an opportunity not to be disregarded. He had started his new life amidst new surroundings with nothing but awkwardness, a weakened will and a sapped strength to compete daily with those whose only jewels were the very ones he lacked. Yet he had nearly held his own with them, and now opportunity was passing them by to knock at his door. Manifestly he must embrace it as well as all others which might follow, or else be content to forever remain a whittler of wood for the mere pleasure of whittling. And were he to carry out his vow to make the most of himself through life and repay to the uttermost his social debt, he must now throw down the thick handle of his

ax and pick up a thin pen with fingers stiffened almost beyond the power to grasp so small a thing. Then all of a second he thought of Barbara Findlay.

A feeling almost of pain filled his breast and for an instant his reply lay upon the tip of his tongue; a short, dogged refusal with perfunctory thanks that would bury him for all time in the snows and mould of the forest with nothing but health-assuring toil as the panacea for his existence, and with nothing but thoughts for his pleasures and pains. For should he go to Archer he would of necessity see the girl much, and his fear of seeing her much was the fear of one who would put a great temptation behind him. Still, his dread of her was but folly after all. It was a thousand chances against one that she would ever feel more than grateful towards him, and that he with an uncleansable blood stain upon his hand and the shadow of prison walls always upon him could ever forget the gulf between them, was unthinkable. After all he might as well fight the fates at their own door as in the fastnesses of a wood. "I'll go," he said quietly.

Findlay's hand dropped upon his shoulder with the dead weight of a maul. "Good. Hustle your pack out and throw it in the sled." Off Wilson went with a quick step and ten minutes later had bidden Flint good-bye and was upon the seat beside the logger as the sled sped along the ice road, the shrill whistle of the wind in their ears. The gray eyes of the elder man were sweeping the opposite bank of the stream where great heaps of logs lay close to the brink and there was a trace of worryment in his voice as he waved his hand comprehensively towards the water.

"All that stuff piled up along there belongs to the Badger crowd, and there's going to be wailing and gnashing of teeth on the part of somebody when the break-up comes unless they give me a square deal on the water proposition. And I'll tell you how it is liable to come to pass. You see old Israel Meyer is the principal old he-coon of that neck of the woods yonder, and if he ever gave woman, man or child a square deal it was because they got the drop on him first. Neither am I over-fond of Cardiff, his walking boss, although I must confess I haven't

anything against him except that I don't like him. Ever meet Cardiff?"

"No. Of course I know of him though."

"Well, if you ever do meet him you'll have to look up about three times to see the top of him. He's a skyscraper. He's taller than the statue of Liberty and twice as big in the shoulders. I guess he could cut off one hand and then whip anybody around these woods that ever jabbed a pike pole into a jill-poke. Good-looking, too, in a roundabout, devilish way. Got a tongue set on ball-bearings and can talk you into a trance if he feels good-natured, or he can curse you into insensibility with words that smell like a dead language. Got some education too. Some say he is a college graduate and the ex-son of a preacher and that he got into grief and came up here to bury himself under the snow banks. Nobody around here knows, though. By the way, you are no fungus yourself, I take it. Never struck me that you were indigenous to this soil. Git 'ap, Jack."

Findlay's slash dropped as lightly as a fly upon the ear of one of the ponies and he bent his glance scrutinizingly upon the one at his

side. Not caring to meet the quasi-question fairly, Wilson dodged it. "So I have been told. I wish you would tell me about the square deal you would like to get from the Badger company. I may need the information sometime."

Findlay nodded. "Good idea. You see the story starts off something like this. That ground hog outfit over there managed by hook or crook—mostly crook—to illegally get legal control of the dams above here and at Archer so that they could regulate the height of the water in the stream to suit themselves. Result is when they want a flood to float their logs down they open the gates and get a deluge, but when I need water for my stuff they hand it to me in a spoon. By the time the break-up comes I will have half my cut hauled in over the ice road, but the other half will be high and dry back there in the woods. It will take them about thirty days after the ice starts to drive the logs down the river into the pond at Archer, and the head of my stuff ought to go down with the tail of theirs. If I floated my logs down with theirs it would be an endless job to sort them, but having half of my cut already on the ground, brought

in by the ice road, I can wait for the rest of it. Now if they are white and will give me enough water for the last of my cut, old Meyer and I will get along happy as two bugs in a rug. But if he shuts the water down when he is through driving, as I have heard it talked he is likely to do, and leaves my logs stranded along the stream where they are liable to be burned up by forest fires—well, I'll try to make him squeal. And after the way I bluffed him out of that tie contract I am figuring that he is stacking the cards to deal himself high, low, jack and the game. But I guess I won't worry much about him unless he gets to be a common nuisance—then I'll take him out in the woods and abate him. Git 'ap, Jack. Hello! There's the metropolis."

They stopped in front of the store at Archer much as a door drawn shut by a heavy spring strikes an air cushion in the last two inches of its flight and closes gently after all, the broncos sliding the final ten feet almost upon their haunches. Blanket roll under his arm Wilson descended and entered his new home. And the first face he saw was that of Barabara Findlay looking down upon him from the top of the tall

stool where it delighted her to perch. He had more than once wondered how he should address her when they next met, whether with the frank cordiality that was his by right of the happenings of fate, or with a subtle formality which her sensitive nature would at once detect and shrink from. The latter seemed the safer way, for it would at once put a barrier between them. For first of all Barbara's nature was responsive. Smile at her and a smile was your reply; frown and you would see it faintly mirrored in her face. Should he approach her with frank pleasure at the meeting he felt sure her greeting would be in kind; but a look askance, an indifferent inflection of the voice or a flabby touch of the hand and she would draw herself within a shell of reserve from which it would not be easy to coax her in the future. And not having fully determined what his course should be and now confronting her unexpectedly, he greeted her not at all, standing silently before her as his thoughts ran back to that day in the forest when he had held her so long and so closely. And she, thinking that which none but herself knew, coloring with a flush that came,

endured and passed in the twinkling of an eye, left her perch with a movement that was neither a slide nor a leap but rather a fluttering down that landed her upon the floor without effort or sound. And there she stood before him with her hand extended and a light of pleasure in her eyes that there was no misreading. Her smile, also, was a welcome in itself, for Barbara Findlay's smile was as sweet as women's smiles are made, honest and generous, too, and at the sight of it and the eye light his reserve went a-begging and his fingers engulfed the white ones before him. "I am glad to see you," he told her earnestly.

She took a backward step, laughing audibly now. "I should think you would be if you stop to think of the trouble I am always making you. The first time I saw you I broke my eggs and you carried them up the hill; the next time I broke your back as you carried me down. I wonder what I am going to do to you next."

He laughed too, almost as lightly as she. "I wouldn't worry about it if I were you. You will probably think up something before long." And with his answer his last thought of reserve

vanished and in an instant they were chatting more like children who meet and become friends upon the instant than as a man and a woman who had lived in the heart of the world and knew it well. Such it had been in the beginning with them, and such it now promised to be to the end. He had always spoken to her with the careless freedom of one who had known her since childhood, fearing not in the least that she would misinterpret him; knowing well that she felt the abiding respect that lay back of his each word no matter how lightly voiced. Just why this had been he did not himself quite understand. Perhaps it was because of the manner of their meeting; perhaps it was because of where they met, for the ways of men and women thrown together upon seas that seem as broad as the heavens themselves; upon prairies that eye-leap after eye-leap do not span; in forests that reach on and on until one wonders that there can still be room for broad seas and sweeping plains are not the ways of men and women who crowd together in rooms where toes must ever be on the alert for other toes. The human instinct swells or shrinks, broadens or narrows, advances or

recedes to the circumference of its environment. And then again perhaps it was that subtle—but who knows! Who cares!

Findlay, entering, took her in his arms for a bear-like hug and a lusty, smacking kiss that brought water to the mouth of the displaced watcher, ending his greeting by pulling wisps of bright hair from place and wrinkling up her nose with his thumb until she finally managed to tread upon his toe and so rout him limping.

Over at the boarding house the supper horn blew and Wilson with hasty ablutions in the corner pan started for the table with considerable zeal. Barbara had left the office and was already half way up the hill that led to the cottage and Findlay was watching her through the window with the eyes of the fondest of fathers. "Wilson," he said seriously as the latter was about to pass, "this is a rough country and it is middling full of tolerable rough men. And while on general principles I'd rather trust a woman who respects herself in a camp of lumber jacks than in a drawing-room packed with dukes, still you can never tell what the other fellow is going to do when you turn your head to order him a

drink. Therefore, if I have to leave the table I always like to take my chips with me or else let someone whom I can trust play my hand while I am gone. Now that girl is my only flesh and blood and I wouldn't have anything bad happen to her for a chattel mortgage on Heaven. This is no place for her, up here in the tall timber, and I tried to keep her in the city where she could have society and all the things that most girls of education and refinement want, but after my wife died she would not listen to it. Said that any place where her old daddy was grubbing out money was good enough for her, and that if she couldn't come up here and keep house for him she'd like to know the reason why. So what in the name of helplessness could I do? You can't bluff her a foot and she is too big to spank, so I just naturally had to knock under. Besides it was an awful temptation to have her here, and I'll admit that much. But I am obliged to be gone a good deal and I am always a little worried about her those times, especially since that time when you brought her in and probably saved her from freezing. Now, Wilson, I don't know much about your antecedents, and probably

some of them got hung the same as mine did, but I'd bet my stake that you, personally, are a *man*. And as a man I want you to do me a big favor. I want you to keep your eye upon her, and I hereby delegate you full guardianship authority over her to keep her out of trouble and keep trouble away from her in my absence. Will you do that much for me?"

Keep his eye upon Barbara Findlay! And with guardianship powers thrown in! Wilson opined that he would.

The girl had reached the cottage and now stood in the distant doorway waving her red toboggan headgear at them. They returned the salute by swinging their caps and bending low in exaggerated homage. Then they looked into each other's faces and smiled that smile of mutual understanding which all men know so well; after which they parted with a hand-grip that would have crumpled the knuckles of city weaklings.

CHAPTER XI

THE days came unannounced, lived their legitimate lives and died neither blessed nor execrated. Findlay was away the major portion of the time now, making flying trips to Archer that usually lasted from Saturday until Monday, then returning to the city from which he held typewritten converse with the rest of the world as he exchanged his good logs for its good money, growing richer and thinner with each shrewd bargain driven. It was a tediously exasperating trip on the bumping logging train, and no man who was not much in love would have made it as regularly as did the lumberman in order that he might have a day with Barbara. On these trips he always spent hours talking to Wilson about her.

"Fact is," he said one time, "I'm head over heels in love with that girl up on the hill, and of course when it comes to fools an old fool is the limit. I guess it is partly because she is a live

image of her mother, and her mother—" Findlay drew a quick breath and ran the back of his hand over his forehead. "Well, if her mother isn't the Queen of Paradise this moment it is because there isn't any such job. Ever tell you how I won her?"

"No."

"Then I guess I will, although I ain't much on hawking family matters, and probably it won't interest you particularly anyway. Still, there was a first-class romance hitched to it after all. It was a long time ago of course—just about the time you were getting born. I was brought up in the woods; have lived in them all my life, and now at fifty am just beginning to think I can see my way out of them. If I have five years more of reasonably good luck I will be able to sell out for enough to enable me to take my girl from this place out into the firmament where she can shine along with the rest of the stars—that is, of course, unless some other man happens to come along and take her away first. Well, 'way back in those dark ages of twenty-five or more years ago I was riding logs—and as often as not river bubbles—and living

along the same as any other boom-skipping lumber jack, the only difference between me and the rest of the boys being that I had symptoms of an education and wanted to get it good and hard, while the rest of them didn't have any and were proud of it. About that time I got acquainted with her mother, Barbara Wines. Barbara Wines was the daughter of old Abraham Wines, who was circuit judge at that time—good old New England thistle stock that got blown out of Vermont somehow or other and took root in the soil up this way. He was a widower then, and Barbara's mother kept house for him at Cypress in just about the same way that my girl is now keeping house for me. In those days Cypress was about the widest open, toughest, meanest, hurdy-gurdy bark and slab shanty monstrosity that was ever perpetrated even in the pine country, with Barbara Wines about its only redeeming feature. She was that girl who is now up there in the cottage almost to a dot, not quite as pretty maybe or as well educated, but pretty enough to make any king turn his head, and better read outside of the statutes than the judge himself. There wasn't any school in

Cypress those days for the reason that nobody had happened to think of one, and the kids used to run wild as porcupines until they got big enough to go into the woods with an ax on their shoulder. But there was saloon for pretty near every adult citizen, and every adult citizen came pretty near supporting one. Hop Smith had a log joint on the outskirts of the burg, and Hop being somewhat of an alleged humorist had put up a sign in front of it that you could see for a mile when you were coming towards it—and you could usually see two of them for the same distance when you went away. The sign read. ‘Hop Smith’s Institute. Wines and other liquors.’

“Well, Barbara’s mother was about twenty then, and she used to worry about those little brats running loose and growing up with no more education than the angle worms they went fishing with. So she tried to get the town to put up a log schoolhouse and let her teach them just for the fun of it, but the town allowed that a schoolhouse was a superfluous redundancy and the old judge did not dare to take up the propo-

sition for political reasons. So Barbara Wines made up her mind that she would do it on her own hook. Off she went to Hop and with that broad, friendly smile that you have seen on my girl's face she began to argue with him like the lawyer's daughter that she was. Hop wasn't any worse than the ordinary man of those days in that community, being not over nine-tenths scoundrel, and she made out a case that convinced him.

“‘All right,’ he says. ‘I’ll build me another shack nearer town and turn this place over to you so you can teach the kids to shun me forever after, provided I get credit for my progressive citizenship. I’ll move out the fixtures and all you will have to do will be to put in a teaching pulpit where the bar is, some deacon seats where the tables are and a water tank in place of the whisky barrel. And that big sign of mine—’ Hop thought for a minute and then grinned. ‘I’ll leave you the sign and all you will have to do will be to change the spelling of one word, Miss Wines. As it now is it reads “Hop Smith’s Institute. Wines and other liq-

ours." After you have changed the spelling it will say "Hop Smith's Institute. Wines and other lickens."'

"I was hanging around town that summer and hankering more than ever for the kind of an education that a man can't get out of a saloon conversation. I could read, write and cipher fairly well, but I had a sneaking desire to get on speaking terms with a grammar and be able to have friendly doings with algebra. Then, too, whenever I watched a bartender mix a drink I got to thinking about chemistry. I could tell the plus and minus signs apart when I saw them together, but I wanted to know what H_2SO_4 stood for. Barbara Wines was the only one in town who could teach me, but I was ashamed to go to day school with those kids whose heads didn't come much above the tops of a pair of cruising boots. So one day I edged up to her on the quiet, stammered out my troubles and offered her about all I had if she would teach me off and on evenings. Well, do you know she flew at the chance like a hawk at a June bug! Wouldn't listen to taking a cent, but made me promise I would come to the house three even-

ings a week. So I did. But we couldn't get satisfactory results there, somehow. Just about the time I'd get a good grub hold on a cube root and had got it half pulled out, someone would so come in to politic with the judge and that would rupture my chain of thought, and mental machinery that I'd got wound up tight would run down all in a second with a whizz like a clock with a broken dog clutch. Then I'd find myself sitting there sweating and red with no more ideas in my head than a rabbit. So we gradually adjourned to the Institute half a mile away, and then I began to do a good deal better. Also by mutual consent we raised the ante to four nights a week. Of course I always had to see her home safe every evening after I had got groggy with knowledge.

"I'll admit that according to modern standards we rather crowded proprieties, a young woman like her teaching a lumber jack like me off there in a log cabin evenings. But you've got to remember that those were pioneer days in this country when everybody did about as he or she pleased and no questions asked, and I doubt if either one of us ever gave that matter a thought.

I know I didn't. And rough, devil-me-care men as most of them were, there was not a jack of them rough or devil-me-care enough to care or dare say a word against Barbara Wines. And if he had, the rest of us would have chained him onto a saw log and shot him head first to glory through Bull Moose rapids. It goes without saying that I fell in love with her without knowing it—that is without knowing it until that night when with hell scorching us I told her about it in water up to our necks, my arms around her waist to hold her up and hers around my neck because there wasn't any other handy place to put them." Findlay's voice had fallen almost to a whisper and now he paused altogether until Wilson jogged him on.

"And that night! We had been working as usual in the log school, I stumbling along as best I could and she helping me up and starting me straight again. It was chilly that evening and I had built a fire in the heater when we first came in, but the heater didn't seem to draw just right and there was more or less smoke in the room after a little while, smoke that kept getting thicker although we were so busy trying

to dissect an algebraical conundrum that we did not pay much attention to it until we began coughing. Then all of a sudden I came back from unknown X to solid earth and looked up. Just at that time something caught my ear and I got on my feet and opened the door in a mighty hurry. All to the north, east and west of us was a line of fire, and the sparks were driving overhead thick as stars. There was a blanket of smoke just beginning to settle down upon us and it was the lower strata of that which I had thought came from the heater. And now that there was no door between it and me I could hear the roar of it, sounding a good deal like a train going over a bridge a long ways off. Then I heard something else that stirred me into life—a quick gasp at my side and I whirled around. Barbara Wines was standing beside me with her hands clasped, and her big eyes staring into the infernal furnace before us, white as a snowbank but, as I found out a moment later, cool as one, too.

“I didn’t wait even to get our hats. I grabbed her by the hand and away we went tight as we could jump down the tote road to the south.

The smoke was whirling around us and the sparks stung like little devils. Half a dozen small blazes started around us and I knew our only hope lay in getting into Lake Beaver, half a mile beyond. Barbara was running as well as any woman in skirts could, and when I turned to say something to her about not giving up she only told me to save my breath for things that were necessary. We made the lake and waded into it up to our necks and between heat and smoke it was the most uncomfortable few hours I ever put in, but on the other hand it was one of the happiest because her arms were around me and when I told her I would rather die with her than live without her she only hung on to me a little tighter as though she hated to let me go. And that night was the official beginning of a mutual love that lasted without a skip or a break until I closed her eyes for the last time more than twenty years after. But every time I look at my girl I see her mother too. So maybe that will help make you understand why I seem a little over-fond of Barbara, even for a father. Don't forget to keep your eye on that shack when you ain't busy, and if

you catch her running off in the woods by herself just because she imagines she is getting a little lonesome, bring her back bodily the way you did the last time if she won't come any other way. If she scratches you I'll raise your pay as a salve. And if anybody attempts to seriously molest her I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll stand behind you with my last dollar and give you a reward of merit card besides if you'll pick up something and kill him for me. Will you?"

The rich color of the younger man's weather-tanned face suddenly turned to a sickly gray and he sank into a chair with the limpness of one who is suddenly stricken with the sickness of death. And Findlay, much alarmed at seeing the uncanny metamorphosis that followed his last words, made a dash for a drawer from which he drew a bottle half filled with whisky. Hurriedly filling a glass he thrust it before his companion's lips. "What's the matter with you, man! Your face looks like a toadstool. Drink this."

The sitter shuddered and sat erect. A dull red glow came surging where the ghastliness

had been and he leaped to his feet with eyes lighted by a great anger. One savage stroke he made and the glass crashed upon the floor; then he stood before his employer with every muscle in a quiver from a passion that seemed about to burst him by its violence.

"Findlay!" he cried fiercely. "I'll look after your daughter all right, and I'll do it as earnestly as if she were my mother, but if you ever offer me another drink of whisky don't be surprised if I knock you flat."

Out of the door he went with a rush, leaving the other man staring after him in a daze of bewilderment. The rapid thump of his footsteps died away and the logger kicked the fragments of glass into a corner and replaced the bottle from whence he had obtained it.

"Glad he don't like the stuff," he mused as he began to whistle thoughtfully. "But what gets me is why the sin he first got white at what I said, then all of a sudden got so darned mad just because I offered him a drink of good liquor."

CHAPTER XII

FINDLAY went back to the town office and Wilson took hold of his new work with a grip that quickly made him the master of it. It was only elementary bookkeeping after all, involving little more than common sense and the logical classification of added and subtracted figures; a system simple to understand and readily amenable to still further simplification. Nor was there work enough about his new position to make it seem more than play to one who had been accustomed to as many hours of hard labor per day as had this new wielder of the pen. In fact when night came he scarcely ever was tired enough to wish to go to bed, and as he took little pleasure in spending his evenings in the close atmosphere of the boarding house bunk shanty, he often sat for many hours in his little room over the store with the lamp turned low and his eyes fastened on the darkness without, turning them from time to time to the little

dwelling upon the hill crest where the window lights twinkled star-like. Day times he occasionally came down from the top of his stool to wait on a stray customer who wished a piece of tobacco or some article of wearing apparel, but oftener still to stretch his cramped legs for a few moments. At these times he invariably made it his business to step to the door for a brief inspection of the Findlay home. Once he caught a glimpse of Barbara as she passed the open door, but the distance was considerable and if she saw him she gave no sign. He used to wonder vaguely at these times how she passed the long hours alone.

But Barbara, although her household duties were light, and despite the fact that she bustled about them as though oceans of work lay before her, was seldom idle. She seemed to possess as great a faculty for finding work still to be performed as she did of performing it after it was found. And as her hands were seldom still, so were her lips not often silent—now humming some air of her schoolgirl days, now formed into a rosy pucker from which came shrill, uncertain pipings like the tentative squeaks of a young

rat; squeaks that sent the house cat slinking into dark corners for the source of the sounds that mystified it beyond feline explanation. For Barbara, although ever ready to belittle her full-throated voice, was vanity itself when it came to her ridiculous whistle. The weather had been grossly disagreeable for some time and she had not passed from beneath the roof. Then one day as the cloud curtain drew itself aside and the sun swung boldly into view she stepped to the door and stood, thought-engrossed, looking down upon the roofs of the scattered hamlet. Several times she had seen Wilson standing at the store door or straightening out the kinks in his legs with the store watch dog pacing behind him, and now sudden determination came upon her; a determination born of a deep sense of obligation and a touch of sympathy for his lonely condition.

"That poor man! He must be dreadfully bored down there with no one to talk to except now and then a lumber jack after another bushel of tobacco. I would die of loneliness if I had to stay in such a place alone. I wonder if he has anything to read evenings! I'll just take

him down something." So she hurried to the book case where she stopped in perplexity, a faint frown wrinkling her forehead and her hand wandering uncertainly over the volumes much as a bee hovers in mid air over a blossom bed before he chooses his flower and makes his dart.

"I wish I knew what he likes, then I would know what to take him. Love stories! He doesn't seem very sentimental—more practical. He would probably laugh up his sleeve at me if I took him one. But I will just chance this one anyway because it is so clever and its ending is such a surprise. Then of course most men like to read about war and blood, and here is a book that has a horribly interesting fight that I know he will revel in, and—" her fingers made another dart and she plucked forth a thin volume triumphantly—"this volume of scriptural quotations is just the thing for Sunday reading. I know he has never read it, and besides, it will counteract the book with the fight in it." She deftly wrapped the selected volumes into a package and started down the hill full of the self-patting complaisance of the righteous who invade

the haunts of the benighted. Wilson, loudly adding up a column, lost his count at the first sight of her face and advanced a few steps to meet her. He was genuinely delighted that she had come, told her so, and took the books thankfully. "No, he had not read any of them, but he certainly should devour them all. It was very thoughtful of her and very agreeable to one to be remembered by certain people."

His manifest appreciation of her charity delighted her, and at once she started in to tell him about the love story. Rapidly she unrolled its intricate plot, skimming swallow-like over the minor details but pouncing upon its crises to hold them triumphantly before him as she dwelt impressively upon the trials of hero and heroine. Then with infinite satisfaction she told him the unexpected climax, when the cunning spinner of the yarn had by a deft move gathered up the loosely woven strands and, presto! tied a nuptial knot that ended all just when one thought the feat impossible.

"Wasn't that fine?" she inquired eager for applause of her recital and confirmation of her

taste. He nodded, a small, queer smile about his lips as he gazed at the volume which he had been turning over mechanically as she spoke.

"Decidedly. But I don't think I care to read it." Instantly Barbara became bolt upright in her chair as she stared at him in amazement.

"Why not?" she gasped.

"Simply because you have told me all about it much more interestingly than could any author. Why, therefore, should I read it when I already know the plot, the crises and the ingenious finale for which I had waited with a scarcely beating heart?"

"Oh!" said Barbara.

He smiled flatteringly. "Wouldn't it be like tediously crawling over a landscape that you had just seen from Pegasus's back?" He asked her this coolly and provokingly, wishing to tease her for a moment just to see what she would do.

"Then I have robbed you of the pleasure of reading the story by my tiresome chatter," she returned coldly, her chin giving itself an upward tilt. He thought it time to begin to be mollifying.

"On the contrary you have given me the much

greater pleasure of listening to your rendition. A good story well told makes the reading of it afterwards flat, stale and unprofitable. What are our great actors but our great story tellers? Who would not rather see Jefferson's Rip than read Irving's? Who—"

She interrupted him icily. "Indeed! I remember now how bored and fidgety you were—turning the book over and over and saying 'yes, yes,' like a ninny while I jabbered on. And the worst of it is that I was a bigger ninny, for I imagined that I was interesting you." She took a step towards him, her mouth compressed into a horizontal wrinkle. "But how did I know you would not read the last page first the way every one else does? Give me my book."

"But Miss Findlay—just a moment—please—"

"No, I don't want to listen to you. I am going to leave before I say something that will spoil the other two. I want my book." She seized the volume from his hand and had opened the door before he could fairly get his tongue in action.

"Come back," he wailed. "I'll read it every

word—twice.” The sharp shutting of the door was her reply, but she had not taken a dozen steps before he was standing upon the platform and pleading against her rapidly vanishing back. “Wait. I want to explain. *Please* wait and give a fellow a chance, won’t you?” But her head still remained high and her feet beat the path in a lively tattoo. He had never seen her vexed like this before, and although he knew her impulsiveness his surprise at her was only equaled by the self-anger that arose within him. To offend and wound her was bad enough, but in addition to that to drive her away just when he would have given a tooth to keep her there was almost enough to make one bite his tongue in twain. And all because of his anserine stupidity! To be sure he had no more intended to offend her than she had intended to spoil the story for reading purposes, but he had only been amused and entertained whereas she had lost her temper completely. He could not understand it. Barbara Findlay with her keen sense of humor losing her temper over a thing as ridiculous as this! Barbara Findlay with her love of teasing not liking to be teased herself! But she was

gone, probably never to return, and it was all his fault. Ass inconceivable. Idiot unspeakable. Fool incomparable. Ass, Idiot, Fool. He bit his lip and thoroughly enjoyed the pain that followed.

From half way up the hill there came back to him a laugh that bubbled and grew until it was suffocated by a white palm suddenly clapped over guilty lips. And the girl hurrying more than ever now ran up the steps and darted in the house with the quickness of a rabbit disappearing in its warren, while the one below, staring after her blankly for a moment, turned into the store with a sigh of relief in the consciousness of having been thoroughly humbugged. It had been Barbara's joke from the beginning. She had started in to tell him the story expecting him to protest, and had he done so she would undoubtedly have dropped the real narrative and gone to inventing just to see what he would do. But he had not protested and therefore she had kept truthfully on to the end. Then he had attempted to mildly irritate her by his provoking tones, and she had recognized his intent and taken the game into her own hands. She had

probably intended to go away much insulted, leaving him to wrack his brains as to how to apologize to her until she forgave him of her own accord, but the laugh had betrayed her and the game was up. They were quits.

And if in the weeks that came thereafter Barbara went to the store for small household needs full as often as necessity demanded, and if finding herself there she listened to his wishes that she remain a while and thus break the monotony of their lives, who is there with spirit mean enough to have denied them? Findlay was seldom home, and when he was his visits with the girl bore the sanctity of close family affairs. That no insinuating tongue could by any possibility be stirred, Wilson would not have called at her home during the father's absence even had she granted him that permission, and grant him that permission she certainly did not. But that they should broaden their acquaintance at this public place of trade in the broad light of day was quite another matter and nothing more natural beneath the sun. It was but the unconscious listening to nature's call; the willing obedience to the primal law which has drawn woman

to man and man to woman through all the ages innumerable. For he was tall and strong and good to look upon through a woman's eyes, agreeable as well; and tall, strong men who are good to look upon and agreeable as well have been of interest to women since the beginning. Then as if that were not enough, he was the only specimen of his kind available; which was a circumstance of tremendous import in itself alone. Strange would it have been if Wilson in his loneliness had not pleaded. Almost stranger had she not sometimes granted. It was kismet.

Spring came with the first breath of the south fanning the cheeks soft as the brush of a feather, followed by lukewarm rains that pitted the bosom of the snow and turned the erstwhile brittle coverlet of the river into a rotten honeycomb. Stray ducks came whistling close overhead, and every now and then the ear caught the muffled drummings of a partridge as he beat the long roll call for his hiding mate. Day by day the growing warmth of the sun's smile warmed the cold bosom of the earth, and day by day the snows sickened and the ice wasted consumptively until the tote roads were awash with

slush and the going anywhere from ankle to knee-deep. It was upon a Sunday morning that Wilson, lazily wandering storeward from the boarding house after dinner, seated himself upon a box with his back against the office to bask, eyes shut, in the almost forgotten luxury of a sun bath when he heard light footsteps coming nearer and unclosed his eyes. He had not seen Barbara for nearly a week, worse luck to it, and therefore was even more pleased than usual to behold her. Her boots were spattered with muddy slush to the bottom of her short walking skirt, and she looked at the brooklets and puddles that bounded her on every side with displeasure plainly written upon her face.

"I have not been out of the house for nearly a week and am suffocating for fresh air," she announced after bidding him a good afternoon. "I don't mind wading through clean snow even if it is deep, but I despise mud and I abominate slush. I want to go somewhere and I wish I had a horse."

Wilson had got upon his feet at her arrival and he sympathized with her fully. She had expressed his own idea and wishes to a dot, and he

looked helplessly at the water-mottled snowscape. Had he possessed a kingdom and had someone else thereabouts owned a horse and side saddle, the chances would have been about equal for an exchange of properties, so much would he have liked to please her. But such not being the case he could not but present her with his regrets. In fact he had already spoken the first few words of his lament when he hesitated, laughed a little, and stepping across the nearby railroad track began to tug at a railroad velocipede that stood beneath the shelter of a small shed where it had been left by the section foreman. "I'll do better than get you a horse—I'll take you out in a motor car," he grunted between tugs.

"Take me out on that!" she exclaimed as she walked around it with a dubious face. "I never heard of such a thing."

"I know it. But why not as well as on a tandem?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I. So come."

"But I can't kick hard enough to make it go and it would tire you out to do it all alone."

He swung the machine upon the rails and ig-

noring her protests waved her to the inside seat of the vehicle. "Leave the getting tired part to me. All you will have to do will be to remain perfectly quiet and do all the talking. I'll make all the other motions and keep perfectly still." Hanging back, yet advancing, protesting that she knew they would have a wreck and both be killed, she at last took her seat upon the inner end of the board and dropped her feet to the stationary rest. Wilson took his seat upon the other side and shoved his boots into the iron stirrups; then seized the cross pumping bar firmly with both hands.

His powerful legs pushed forward like steam-driven pistons and his broad shoulders came back with a tug that had the full weight of his body in it and the miniature car gave a forward leap. Back and forth he swung with the rhythmic movements of a finished oarsman and the first low purr of the cog wheels arose to a whine. Increasing the rapidity of his stroke as momentum was gained he sent the "pede" scuttling along the rails like a fleeing creature; darted over the trestle that spanned the river with a clattering roar; swung around a curve and plunged

into the narrow aisle that led straight into the far-away between the solid ranks of the towering forest armies. Vagrant wisps of bright hair snatched from place by the whipping rush of air fluttered about her temples and her enthusiasm mounted with the growing speed. The fragrance of the woodland was about them; scents from leaves born that very day; from buds swelling with a life new to them; from maples bursting with sweetness; from cedar; from fir; from balsam; from pine, all yielding up their incense to the sun god in one faint perfume of incomparable blending. The light in the girl's eyes grew brighter and she laughed contentedly. Her cheeks flushed with the joy of motion and her strong young limbs clamored for a part in the graceful sway of the man who was driving them on. She dropped her feet to the moving stirrups and caught the driving bar as it swung near her chest. He shook his head warningly, but she bobbed hers defiantly and the next instant was swaying in unison with him. Three miles they reeled off in thrice as many minutes, the girl's delight increasing as each cross post arose before them in the distance,

rushed down upon them and then leaped past to join its vanishing fellows. "Faster. Faster," she urged.

Only too willing to humor her, Wilson responded instantly, putting all the strength of arms, back and legs into a mighty heave. And unscientifically balanced by the novices who drove it, the light machine reared like a mustang beneath a quirt slash and, leaping the track, went thumping over the ties in a series of wild buckings that lasted for a dozen yards and terminated with a rear kick that all but unseated them. As he had seen the first wheel leap from the rail, Wilson had thrown his arm tightly around the waist by his side, and with his free hand clutching the seat hung on to girl and machine with the grip of death until the cessation of motion. So now they there sat precariously perched upon a machine that was as inert as a log, her hat jolted over her forehead and his gone entirely, looking into each other's eyes with an expression that was half apprehension and half disgust. There was no more necessity that he should continue to sit with his arm around her now than that he should encircle a tree with it, yet sit there

without movement he did until beyond all question what the moment before had been a protecting and entirely justifiable clasp, had through the stoppage of the car been transformed into an entirely inexcusable hug. For several seconds neither embraced nor embracer seemed to realize that circumstances had suddenly changed, and that changed circumstances often greatly alter cases, then mutual comprehension came and the girl's eyes, which had been wide and round and looking full into his, dropped guiltily. And at the falling of her lashes his arm followed suit as though smitten by paralysis.

She slipped from the seat and started away. "I told you we would run off the track," she asserted. Walking to a nearby pile of logs that bordered the rails she seated herself near its base where she removed her hat and began rearranging her tumbled hair. As for Wilson, he gathered up his own flown headgear and began walking around the derailed machine with an expression of perplexity.

"I understand now how it came about," he called to her after a bit. "You see we didn't balance it correctly when we got on. The seat

and gear are over the right-hand rail, and when two people are on the machine there is comparatively little weight resting on the other rail. In order to nullify the centrifugal force of rapid motion, the heavier person should always sit on the left or inside seat. That counterbalances the weight of the machinery and the lighter person and distributes the weight on both rails more evenly. Instead of doing that we reversed the proposition—”

“And came very near being reversed ourselves,” retorted the girl from a mouth that bristled with hairpins.

“Yes. If we had been seated the other way it could not have happened.” He started towards her satisfied that his explanation had been sufficient to convince any reasoning person. “Of course, you understand,” he went on confidently.

She halted him with a quick gesture. “Of course I do *not*. And I would not believe a word of it if I did. It is pure fiction invented by you to deceive me. Didn’t I tell you it would happen? And should not I know well enough by this that every time I see you something will

go wrong? No, don't you come a step nearer. This log pile would fall down and crush us both if you stepped a foot on it."

He placed his hat where it belonged. "I'd just as soon be here anyway," he returned, beginning to whistle indifferently. He fell upon the machine and swung it around so that it pointed towards Archer, but allowed it to remain unlifted from the ties. Having done that he sat down upon the frame and became engrossed with her nimble fingers as they darted here and there in her hasty hair dressing. This she finished and sat looking at another pile of logs opposite where she was, her profile turned towards him and never a glance his way. Five silent minutes passed and the man began to fidget. As to just how serious she was in her declarations he was uncertain, but he now resolved to find out. "May I come and sit on that other pile of logs just across from where you are?" he called.

Her head shook rapidly. "It seems safe enough provided you kept that far away, but I know it would be tempting fate. You had better not come—just yet." He made a preliminary

move towards going despite her time-qualified refusal, then abruptly paused and reseated himself. For emerging from a woods trail that led to the railroad came a man with the form of a Hercules, yet who despite his great size moved with the elasticity of a lynx. A towering, steel-blue-eyed giant, he bore a head of golden hair beneath which was a face that would have held one's eyes even had there been a less magnificent pair of shoulders beneath it. It was a profile strong of nose and chin, but sullen of mouth and passion-marked—a face nobly designed in the mind of the sculptor, yet spoiled in the execution. The flannel shirt, open one button at the neck, showed a throat broad and white, and the topmost inch of the chest that was revealed swelled outward from the base of the neck like a billow. His closely fitting trousers were tucked into the tops of cruising boots, and when he leaped the ditch and came up the low embankment the outlines of magnificent leg muscles were clearly revealed beneath the cloth. At the top of the grade his eyes dropped to the man seated upon the machine and he became motionless.

He seemed upon the verge of speaking when

a slight movement on the part of Barbara caught the corner of his eye and he swung his face towards her. Unmistakable perplexity showed itself in his every feature as without speaking he glanced from the man to the girl and back again, then noting that the machine was derailed he seemed to comprehend. He removed his broad brimmed hat and bowed to her, and Wilson could not but marvel at the change wrought upon his features by his smile. The sullen mouth became a pleasing one set with strong rows of even teeth, and the steel in the eyes melted to a softness that made them seem almost kindly. And when he spoke as his hat settled upon his golden crown again there was a deep-toned harp vibrant in his voice.

“Good day, Miss Findlay. I presume we are mutually surprised. You have been in a railroad wreck, I see.” She acquiesced.

“Yes, it was dreadful. Only two left alive.” She arose and turned towards Wilson who got upon his feet as well. “Mr. Cardiff and Mr. Wilson, it is inevitable that you should know each other. And as natural business foes I am delighted that you should meet first upon neutral

ground. Mr. Cardiff, as everyone hereabouts knows, is woods manager of the Badger Company, while Mr. Wilson—" she paused in her introduction, hesitated after the manner of one who mentally debates swiftly, then completed her sentence almost defiantly, "is *our* local manager."

A faint smile half of amusement and half of contempt swept across Cardiff's face, and Wilson felt the sharp sting of humiliation and anger. Keenly enough he realized the desire on Barbara's part to champion him and put him upon an equal footing with this man, who next to the owners was the head of the big business corporation with whom her father had waged so long and fierce a battle; but still more keenly did he realize the ridiculousness of such a championship. It was as absurd as would have been the introducing of a corporal under the title of brigadier, and Wilson would have infinitely preferred that she had designated him as "one of our lumber jacks" than try and promote him before the one who was now laughing before his face. But he only smiled carelessly as he thrust out his hand.

"Which in other words, Mr. Cardiff, means that I am Mr. Findlay's storekeeper and book-keeper at Archer," he explained, growing secretly joyful as he became cognizant of the fact that the one who had misrepresented him to his humiliation was now in turn squirming. Cardiff nodded his understanding.

"Draws the same pay whatever job you call it," he announced. He thrust out his hand and his fingers closed about those of the other with the constricting power of an anaconda. And as Wilson met the pressure pound for pound they stood eyeing each other at point blank range, motionless, but straining like two bull moose who lock antlers in a semi-friendly testing of each other's strength. But Wilson relaxed his muscles not a whit, and closer and more vise-like grew Cardiff's compress until a stinging pain ran up the other's arm and threatened to turn his placid smile into a grimace of pain. Then, just when a yielding seemed inevitable, the blond giant dropped the bloodless knuckles and turned his back almost squarely upon the storekeeper. Whereat Wilson shifted his shoulders as well and the pair stood flank to flank, each to all

appearances unconscious that the other lived. The girl had been watching them intently with silent interest.

Cardiff spoke to her. "If you have a few moments to spare, suppose we sit down and have a little visit. It has been quite a time since we had a confab, you know." No voice could have been more deferential than was that of the sonorous-toned man now addressing her, yet Barbara seemed to be edging from him at his every word. There was no perceptible movement of her feet and her face was as placidly expressionless as a mirror confronting space, yet unmistakably the distance between herself and the speaker was steadily growing greater. This fact and her reply tickled Wilson hugely.

"Really, I don't believe I should remain away from home any longer, Mr. Cardiff. I think we must be going, for as you can see it is becoming—" she shot a sly glance at the ignoring pair as she huddled herself together with a little shiver,—“decidedly chilly.”

A glint of anger flashed in the woods manager's eyes and he stepped back a pace. Wilson lifted the “pede” to the rails and assisted the

girl to the outer seat. Barbara's farewell bidding at the starting of the machine was a faint smile and a wave of the hand; Wilson's a half-inch nod of the head; Cardiff's a lifting of the hat to her and a complete ignoring of the one who sat by her side. And whatever the cause of it might have been, the girl pumping steadily along the miles remained quiet beyond all precedent; while Wilson after a few attempts to draw her into a conversation grew silent as well. So they finished the last half of the way without speaking and at the store bade each other a formal "good-day" and went their respective ways immediately. But she remained in Wilson's mind even more persistently than usual that evening.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ice broke in the river and the great drive of the Badger Lumber Company was on. For miles along the North Branch, and for other miles along its tributaries, hundreds of men were toiling with cant-hook and peavy, and into the flood loosened by the upper gates the logs went tumbling. At the high rollways the splashing and plunging was tremendous.

Findlay daily grew more nervous. "Don't like the way old Meyer is acting up," he confided to his storekeeper one day as the big drive of his rivals was drawing to a close. "He's got the main body of his stuff down already and in a couple of days more he will be through. Asked him yesterday when I should start my stuff and he looked at me sideways for a second like a hog going to war and then rubbed his hands together. 'Don't be in a hurry, John,' he says. 'You know how you can trust me.' Well, that's just it. I *do* know how I can trust him.

I wouldn't believe anything he said if I knew it was true. Now, what do you suppose he meant when he said that?"

"I haven't an idea."

"Then I've got you tied. Neither have I. But whatever it is there is pretty sure to be sleight-of-hand back of it. However, I presume I'll find out soon enough."

And he did. That very day the upper gates were closed, and the next morning the North Branch was a flat, placid stream, shallow and bar interspersed, impassable even by a rowboat. Immediately Findlay sought out Meyer and demanded that the latter give him flood water that he might float his logs down; whereat the other man threw aside his mask and faced him uncompromisingly. He was a wiry man, half Scotch and half Jew, keen, absolutely unscrupulous and afraid of nothing mortal.

"If you want water go and hire a rain-maker. I built those dams and spent thousands of dollars in clearing out the upper creeks and making them usable. Our company came into this country and broke the way when you were riding logs for us, and we have riparian rights here

which the courts have recognized. Heretofore I have given you water out of pure charity and because I wanted to help you along. To repay me you underbid me on a tie contract and think you can buck me all up and down the line. Maybe you are big enough and maybe you ain't. Try it." Findlay began to grow angry.

"I'll admit that you came here first and got rich stealing government pine while I scratched along on my own holdings and paid for every tree I cut. And I'll further admit that you spent your money and lobbied down at the legislature until you got certain unjust laws passed which favor you. You have got first call on these waters and nobody denies it, but you can't own them until you own the heavens that they fall out of. Now you have had all the flood you need and it is up to you to let me have the rest. You open those gates."

"I'll be double damned if I do."

"Then I'll open them for you."

Meyer slowly opened the door of his safe and took from the interior the copy of a paper. "I guess you'll think twice about it after you have read this. I thought you might be inclined to

be quarrelsome, so I concluded to anticipate you. You're smart enough, John, but you don't get up early enough for old Meyer. Here is an injunction issued by Judge Blanke of the circuit court, enjoining anyone from opening those upper gates or in any way monkeying with them. It also authorizes me to prevent any interference with them by all force necessary. I have got a lot of men stationed there armed with rifles, and while we don't want to hurt anybody, if anyone is fool enough to try and violate this court order we are empowered to defend its mandates. Want to read it?"

Findlay read the injunction with a sinking heart and a rising rage. It was tyrannical, absolute, sweeping. Meyer was given authority to keep the gates down, "using all due force necessary," and those words meant that he might kill in defense of the property placed within his charge, while should others kill them it would be murder pure and simple. It was the case of a man's dam being his castle. Findlay threw the paper down with a curse.

"It's infamous, and of course I know how you got it. Judge Blanke who issued it is both your

tool and your fool. He is a scoundrel of the dirtiest water, and that is why I opposed his election, and that is why you contributed to his campaign fund. Now he is getting even with both of us by issuing this injunction." Meyer seemed pleased.

"Go and tell him that and maybe he will set it aside."

"I've told him often enough that he was a scoundrel, and evidently he hasn't forgotten it. But thank the lord there are courts above him. The supreme court would not let an order like that remain in force for five minutes if it was brought to their notice."

"Then why don't you go before the supreme court. It meets again only next fall, you know."

Findlay strode away in a rage which made his face a-glower; at his wit's end for all of that. Judge Blanke in addition to being an unscrupulous, pettifogging politician, whom Meyer's influence and money had nominated and elected, was Findlay's bitterest enemy, and the latter well knew that to appeal to him for justice was to cast pearls before swine. And as Meyer had said, he would not be able to bring the matter before the

upper court until fall, now several months away. To have his logs left lying in the woods all summer meant their destruction by the worm unless they were barked—in itself a costly proceeding—and the fire danger was impossible to provide against. So he called Flint into consultation.

The walking boss heard him through and stood moodily at the window of the store as he looked far up the railroad track and tugged at the ends of his mustache. "I only know one way to fight," he replied thoughtfully at the end of many minutes of silence, "and that is to fight to win. I ain't looking for trouble, but when a man comes at me from behind I'm going to whip him as quick as I can, as hard as I can and any way that I can. I don't believe in a defensive battle when you are up against a foul fighter. I believe in getting your man."

Findlay believed in that, too.

"And so do I. If I could manage to get a leg hold on friend Meyer I'd jiu-jitsu him until he squealed like a cub bear in a trap. Now this pond over here is jammed with their logs, which they are holding by means of the Archer dam. They have got her shut down as tight as they

have the upper dam, and everybody below is hollering about it. They have been monkeying with the level of the river for years squarely in the face of the law and—" He whirled upon his walking boss like a flash and, grasping him by the shoulders, stood looking into his face from the distance of a yard. Sharply his voice rang in the little room.

"The county line runs down the middle of this river, and therefore this lower dam is in Judge White's circuit as well as in Blanke's, and I can get a square deal from Judge White any day. All we have got to do is make a showing and he will do what he thinks is right. We can make the showing without any trouble, and as the other side won't be in court the judge won't know what we are up to. And he is holding court in Northland now." His watch seemed to fly from his pocket into his hand as he looked at it and calculated rapidly. "Eight o'clock and no train over this jerk-water road until four this afternoon. That will get us in Northland too late for court, and nobody knows what Meyer may think up before to-morrow. We might make it by killing a team of horses—"

"The switch engine!" yelled Flint, starting for the door. "I will get Charlie to back her down here while you telephone the division superintendent for permission to run her into Northland."

Out of the door he went on the run, covering four ties at a leap as he bounded towards the squat locomotive that panted motionless half a mile up the track, while his employer roared into the telephone. Thirty minutes later they were watching the track slip under them at the rate of thirty miles an hour, and by the middle of the forenoon they leaped from their seats to the sawdust of Northland.

Judge White listened to their affidavits, which solemnly averred that the Badger Company was violating the law, and skimmed over the statutes regulating the flow of streams. He was an honest man but totally unfamiliar with logging waters, having come from the southern portion of the state to temporarily take the place of the regular judge because of the latter's illness. He listened attentively to Findlay's lawyer, and then issued his mandate with but a foggy understanding of what lay behind the in-

nocent sounding petition of the men before him. The mandate commanded that the Badger Company immediately raise its gates at Archer sufficiently to permit the free and natural flow of the water until the next day, when Meyer might appear before him with any reasons as to why the flow should not continue. Of course, if he found that the turning loose of the water was working any hardship upon the Badger Company, why he would regulate it to the best interests of all concerned. But he did not see how the loosing of the stream could harm anyone, particularly in so short a time; and as the Badger Company were violating the law, he would order them to obey it until he had heard from them. Findlay and Flint he appointed as special deputies to see that the order was carried into effect. But he strove to be impartial, and he strictly enjoined them that the dam or gates were not to be destroyed or injured in any way until the other side had had an opportunity to present its side of the case, and the whole matter had been heard and settled finally. So away went the pair with permission to raise the gates, but commanded

to do no violence to the structure, while it also came to pass that a friend of Meyer happened to be in the court room at the time of issuing of the order, and the latter heard all about the affair over the telephone within half an hour after the departure of the two. Then with a desperate energy that could not have been surpassed by Flint himself, he and Cardiff set to work to render the efforts of his enemies futile until he could get before Judge White and point out to him the desperate straits the raising of the gates of the lower dam would put him in. It would only take a few hours to get at White, but none knew better than they what disaster a few hours of free running water would work upon them.

Findlay and Flint were back in Archer within three hours, and from afar saw a swarm of Badger men working like bees upon the dam as, rifles in hand, they advanced full of wonderment at the activity of their rivals at a point where they had expected inertia. But hesitating not a step, grim of face and with jaws set, straight through the hostile force they thrust themselves until they stood at the top of the gate and there paused. For driven to its lowest notch and bound to the

massive timbers of the bulkhead by a tangle of heavy log chains that were spiked and bolted into the solid wood, the gate was as firmly locked to the dam as is the door of a vault to the vault itself. Silently Findlay and Flint stood looking at the labyrinth of chains, until Meyer, edging his way to their side, stood there with a deep scowl.

"Well, why don't you open her up?" he demanded. Findlay shot him a quick glance from the corner of his eye, but said nothing, and the other went on with his bullyings.

"Of course, it could be done by chopping out the gate or blowing it out, but your cursed order forbids you from destroying either the dam or the gate—and we are here to see that you don't. Mind you, I am not going to fight your court order just now, and if you can get those bolts and clinched railroad spikes out without injury to my dam, you go ahead. But if you put the tooth of a saw or the edge of an adz to those timbers there is going to be war, and bad war at that. You can't break the chains and you couldn't saw them in two in a week, even if you had the tools—which you haven't. And by to-

morrow your order won't be worth the paper it is written on." He stopped with an ugly laugh and then sneered in their faces. "So what are you going to do about it?"

The muzzle of the walking boss' gun sunk and the click of the hammer sounded ominous in the silence. "Stand back there and you'll see," he returned roughly. Then before even Findlay comprehended he took quick aim and pulled the trigger of his heavy 405 Winchester. There was a roar from the gun, a simultaneous explosive ring and the whining sound of shattered metal hurtling through space as a section of the chain leaped like a wounded serpent, and uncoiling, fell with a dull rattle down the side of the gate. "Chain number one off and no damage done the dam," said Flint grimly.

The silence that followed the words of the walking boss was the silence of bewilderment, when for the moment men know not how to act, and stand motionless until rage moves them. "Two," cried Flint as another piece of chain dissolved before their eyes like a bursting bubble. Gray of face and with lips twitching, Cardiff bore down upon the two with a heavy peavy in

his hands, but Findlay met him half way, equally threatening and far better armed.

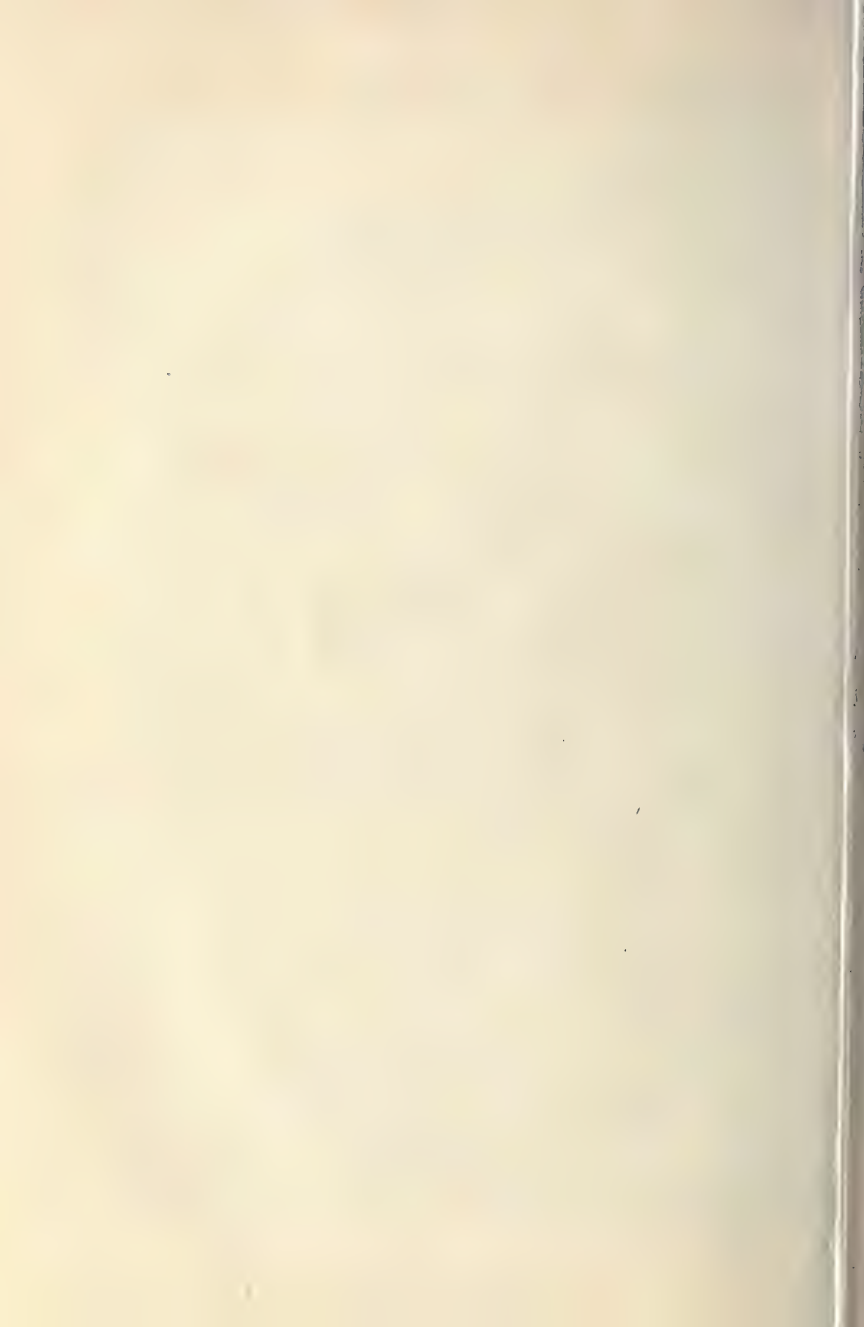
"None of that," he cried sternly. "You have got your men on the upper dam with instructions to shoot, and as long as the law lets you keep them there I have got to respect it. But it is equally true that we are acting under authority of the courts on this dam, and will protect ourselves at all hazards. Shoot away, Jim."

Slowly, steadily the rifle boomed and coil by coil the gate's manacles fell. And drawn to the spot by the heavy bombardment there came leaping the woodsmen of the different clans, the Badger men who were rafting above the dam and the remnants of Findlay's old woods crew, now waiting around Archer for his drive to start, who, drawing themselves into tight knots just beyond the danger zone, silently watched the freeing of the gate. Once more Flint filled the magazine as his cold gray eyes swept the crowd, then fired again. The last shackle fell and the walking boss let the butt of his rifle drop to the ground. "Lend a hand here, men of Camp 5," he cried.

From out of the bunch big Joe Lebeau came



Gray of Face and Lips Twitching—Cardiff with a Heavy Peavy in
His Hands



swaggering with Fighting Foy and Welch Jimmy close at his heels. "We mek heem open up dam queek, by gar. Is it not so, my frien's?" grinned the Canadian as he threw his two hundred pounds upon the hoisting bar. Six inches the gate arose beneath the heave of the woodsmen, and a rush of black waters went swirling down the chute. A triumphant yell burst from the men of Camp 5, while back of Cardiff his loggers shifted uneasily upon their feet with their eyes fastened upon their leader.

"Yo-heave, yo-heave," sang Flint as he timed his chant to the swing of the men, and the barrier arose in a succession of rapid jerks. Below the chute a surging mill-race of yellow-crested water swirled down the half dry course of the river and the first low rumble of the flood grew into a deafening roar. And to their center the pent waters felt the suck and into the bosom of the pond deep eddies bored like augur holes as the undertow tugged from shore to shore. Then, slowly at first, but gathering momentum with each yard passed, the great log fleet swung into the current and bore down upon the vortex, while the faces of Meyer and Cardiff grew

ghastly with fear. Roaring like a bull, Cardiff sprang to the shore, and with his men hard on his heels, went recklessly leaping from log to log as with might and main they strove to herd the stampeding logs into shore rafts beyond the draught. But the might of the river was upon them, its great hand gripping them from below and dragging them onward with a power that was beyond the power of man to stay. Leaping, up-ending, grinding against the sides of the chute, the foremost logs went through in a great hurdle for the big river fifteen miles away, every stick of them lost forever to the ones who by heart-breaking toil had dragged them from the vitals of the forest. Cardiff, his face wet with the sweat of despair, raged like a demon as he sought to jam them and stay their flight. Already hundreds of good logs were lost to his employer forever and thousands of others were pressing forward for the plunge, leaping the brink as frightened sheep leap a fence.

Along the dam four of the Badger men came struggling with the points of their pike poles sunk deep in the thick hide of a forest giant as

they shoved it before them in a desperate attempt to wedge it crosswise in the throat of the flume. Once fairly lodged, the tremendous force of the waters would hold it as in a vise and the oncoming trunks would jam behind it into a solid bulwark. They would pile upon it, be pounded to the bottom beneath it and pack in behind it in a mighty jam practically unbreakable, and the waters would again be stayed and the Badger logs saved. And well knowing this, from all sides came the men of Camp 5, shouting and brandishing their fists as their primordial passions swelled fiercely within them and the lust of battle filled their breasts. Cardiff, adrip with ice water, burst through the press and leaped upon the dam.

"Make way there," he bellowed. "Make way there, you cursed timber pirates. Wedge her, boys—jam her." Flint's tall form seemed to grow even taller, and his eyes blazed like a catamount's.

"No you don't," he roared back. "One log jammed in there would block the stream in ten minutes so there wouldn't be enough water go-

ing through to drown a skunk. And this court order calls for an unobstructed flow. Back up there before I hurt someone bad."

From the outskirts of the crowd a heavy pine slab came whizzing, and striking the gun of the walking boss, sent it flying from his hands. In an instant the man who had thrown it went down in a whirlwind of savage kicks and blows, while the top of the dam became black with struggling men, Lebeau raging among them like a bull moose. And half mad with despair and rage Meyer leaped forward just as Flint straightened up from recovering his weapon. "You started those logs down and now you go with them," he yelled with a swing of his fist. And Flint, caught unawares and smitten heavily, staggered backward to the brink with a wild up-throwing of his arms and a headlong plunge among the churning logs. Then from somewhere in the struggling crowd—just where no one ever told—a shot rang out and Cardiff lurched and fell upon the dam.

Cold with horror at the double tragedy Findlay sprang forward. Risking his limbs at every leap he went down the rock-backed incline of the

dam and raced with all his might beside the torrent as his eyes swept the waters for the form of the man who had gone down that seething maelstrom. The logs upheaved as if in mortal combat; fell upon each other with ponderous blows; ground the bark from their sides against the rocks of the narrow gut and then fell apart in the broader waters below to wallow through the waves of the more placid reaches beyond. Once below the gut a strong swimmer if unhurt would stand an excellent chance for life, but that a man could go through that grinding mass unhurt seemed little less than a miracle. Yet as Findlay reached the bend and ran his eyes over the scattered logs beyond his heart arose with a leap that nearly suffocated him, for far down the river he saw a tall form come crawling out of the water and drag itself up the bank.

Back to the dam he ran and scrambled up its steep abutment. The logs were still pounding through and the roar of the waters had not lessened, but the voices of the men were stilled. Brought to their senses by what at first blush had seemed a double killing they had drawn apart, staring dumbly at each other with guilty

eyes, then sullenly laid down their weapons. Then some went running down the bank after Flint while others tore sleeves from their shirts and made rude attempts to stanch the blood which flowed from a tear in Cardiff's scalp. As for Meyer, he was sitting upon a rock when Findlay came up, white of face and breathing heavily. Flint had gone down among the logs to death in the melee which he had instigated, and the logs which he had won by so many long months of scheming and toil were lost to him forever. Black despair born of a murderous, passionate act and great money loss was upon him, and he buried his face in his palms as Findlay's fingers closed upon his shoulder instead of striking him down as he thought his rival was about to do.

"Meyer," said Findlay as a sob shook the other's wiry frame, "we have bucked each other pretty hard in snow and ice water for the past few years, but seeing that Flint came out of that hellrace alive I don't know as I hate you so much. All I want is to carry on my business, live and let live, but this thing bids fair to be the ruin of us both. You have got me tied up

and can pretty near bust me before I can get loose, and your stuff is going to glory forty miles an hour. Do you want to call this fight off and start all over again?"

Meyer's face was uplifted and incredulity filled his eyes. "How?" he asked hoarsely.

"Will you have your injunction set aside and let me have all the water I need if I lower this gate and fail to prosecute you for attempted murder?"

Meyer looked around. The surface of the big pond was alive with logs. They were sailing upon the gate in rafts, in squadrons, in flotilla's, in fleets; resistless in their advance and beyond the power of man to control so long as the giant clutch of the river was upon them. And beyond them were other fleets that filled the river for miles, coming down thousands strong, shoulder-ing each other roughly aside in their eagerness for the plunge. His bosom swelled and the veins grew big and black upon his forehead. "Yes, John," he gasped.

Findlay arose and his voice rang high above the voice of the waters. And at his call a dozen men leaped forward and the gate fell with a

plunge that cut the torrent half in two. The weight of the waters crushed it against the frame and it hung motionless, but heavy mauls fell upon it and foot by foot it cut its way downward until it rested upon the bottom. The waves that were already below the dam rushed madly away with no other waves following, and the waters above surged back in long swells that checked the advance of the log fleets until momentum was lost and they swung listlessly at anchor. Up the bank came Flint with a great rage in his heart as he headed for Meyer, but Findlay met him ten feet from his man and caught his arm.

"It's all right, old man," he said soothingly. "Come on while I tell you about it."

He linked his arm through that of the wrathful walking boss and half dragged him down the road, quieting him with rough thumps upon the chest as he talked rapidly. Gradually the rebellious balkings of Flint ceased and his first hot words degenerated into a series of sulky grunts. Then almost without resistance he allowed himself to be shoved across the threshold of the boarding house bunk shanty where dry clothing hung upon the walls and the heater roared.

CHAPTER XIV

Two days later Findlay awakened Wilson at four o'clock in the morning.

"I've got my crew scattered all along the river and the drive is about to start. All we have got to do to get white water is send a man up to the dam with instructions and Meyer's man up there will open the gate. There won't be anything to do in the way of work here, and I thought maybe you would like to take a run up there and stand around for a few days and watch how she goes. But do just as you please about it. I can send someone else if you don't care to make the trip."

Wilson rolled out of bed and began dressing. "I'll go," he rejoined. Then he rested one foot on the window sill and began lacing his boots as he talked on.

"Do you know, Mr. Findlay, if it was not for the fact that I earn more money here at the store, and that it seems to be a man's duty to earn all

he can in this world, I'd rather be out there in the open than cooped up here inside of walls! Somehow I seem to hanker for the great unroofed where there is nothing over one all day long but his hat, and where he is near enough to the trees to smell them. And I even got to like the labor, hard as it was. There is something about doing the kind of work that makes your muscles swell and keeps you hungry all the time that makes you feel big and independent and like a man. In other words, I'd rather be cutting down a tree than sharpening a lead pencil. Both are cutting wood, but one makes you hungry and the other only gets lead on your fingers. And you can think just as well while you are doing one job as the other." He finished his boot lacing and aimed one finger out of the window. "You see that big white pine on top of that ridge over there? It is four feet through that stick at the butt and it is fifty feet to the lowest branch—but I climbed to the top of it one day. Now how do you suppose I did it?"

"Climbing spurs?" ventured the listener.

"No. I shinned up a sapling until I got into the branches of that young pine that stands close

beside the big one. I got clear to the top of the slender one and then swayed it back and forth until I could grab a branch that stuck out from the big fellow. Then I let go with my feet but hung on with my hands, and for a few seconds you can imagine I was in some suspense with fifty feet of nothing between myself and the ground. I threw one leg over the limb and swung up on top of it like I used to get on a turning pole when I was a boy, and then went on up until I was above everything else in sight, being in the top of the tallest tree on the highest hill around here. And as far as the eye could reach in every direction there was nothing but an unbroken, heaving sea of tree tops; an ocean of green with but one blight in it. And what do you suppose that blight was?"

Findlay shook his head.

"This burnt-off, cut-down, shanty and slab-haunted place that we now abide in. Everything else was clean woods."

"If it wasn't for Archer you never would have been here to climb to the top of that tree," grumbled the owner of the maligned place. "Quit kicking at gift horses. They can kick too."

"I understand perfectly and I agree with you. But that is not what I was getting at—that part of what I was saying was merely an involuntary prelude. What I was about to remark is this. I hung there in the air several seconds longer than necessary just from the pure pleasure of it; having a good deal the same sensations I imagine a chimpanzee has when he swings by his hands. And I had no more fear of falling than has the ape. I don't seem to have any such things as nerves any more, and I am glad of it for I don't need 'em. When I put my dependence upon my muscles now-a-days I know they are not going back on me. When I came here it was not that way by a long shot, so you can see what the woods have done for me in that respect. And I don't believe that I have degenerated mentally either. I have not read much fiction it is true, but I have bent close to the ground and watched things grow out of it, and I have looked up at these gorgeous northern stars and been nearer to them than I ever was before. And I have seen sunrises and sunsets that will abide with me as long as I have memory—blood-red suns hanging in skies that flamed

like a fire. And only last night I saw the search light of the north pole streaming from rim to rim of the sky. As long as I have to work with my hands for a living I am going to do it here in the woods. It is harder work and longer hours and no better pay than I could get for digging sewers in a city—but where is the comparison?”

“But it is funny that you should have to labor with your hands for a living,” echoed Findlay significantly. “I’ve often thought of it and so has Barbara; I know that because she has spoken to me about it. You have a level head and you are an educated man. Why, you use almost as good grammar as me.”

“Nevertheless I *do* have to labor with my hands, you may be very sure. I have absolutely no money at my disposal except what I earn from you day by day, no profession and practically no business experience. That is why I want to see the drive. I want to learn logging from A to Izzard, for I have an idea that I am going to stick to it. In the first place it is as good a business as a man can be in whether he has money or no money, and in the second it is congenial.”

"I'm glad you are interested in it and I'll push you along as fast as I can. You've got brains and education and enthusiasm, and that is the kind of a man I want," returned Findlay as the other man finished with the wash pan. And Wilson going to the boarding house packed his stomach tightly with solids and betook himself off on his twelve-mile tramp to the upper dam.

He arrived there at nine o'clock and proceeded at once to the water's edge. As far as the eye could reach the pond was alive with logs that crowded it from shore to shore and which were backed far up on the low lands that were overflowed by the pent waters. And it was with these latter logs that lay in the shoal water that the main body of the upper driving crew were most concerned, for while the bulk of the stuff lying in the free water of the pond would be sucked through the chutes without causing more trouble than guiding and fending, the remaining "jill-pokes" back in the shoal waters where the current pulled but feebly were liable to become stranded. These, therefore, had either to be herded into the deep water or left behind and lost.

The dam watcher of the Badger Company sitting idly upon the structure surveyed the newcomer with curiosity. Wilson approached him. "Mr. Findlay sent me up to tell you to hoist her," he announced and the woodsman tapping his pipe upon a beam slowly arose and threw his weight upon the lever at one side of the gate as he began taking in the chain over the ratchet wheel. Wilson seizing the opposite lever did likewise and under the foot of the gate the black water began gushing. And as the Badger logs a few days before had moved majestically forward to their owner's acute financial loss, so now did this great fleet sail on to John Findlay's happiness and prosperity. Through the chutes they plunged endlessly into the river below and were whirled down stream on the torrent, while strung along the shores the sweating crews worked like beavers as they rolled in other thousands from the piles that fringed the low banks or tumbled them headlong down the rollways of the bluffs. Above the dam in the overflow of the pond, often in ice water up to their waists, men forced the obdurate jill-pokes from the shoals into the clutch of the stream, while further out on the

main body of the floating mass their spike-shod comrades leaped from log to log as they nursed them as vaqueros nurse restless cattle. The light pieces that showed a tendency to wander they drove into the main mass with their steel gaffed poles; logs that balked and would go sideways they straightened head-on for the plunge through the foam and rocks. Often sinking to their knees in their flights across the shifting mass as their weight fell upon a stick too light to support them; occasionally losing their poise and going into their necks in waters as cold as the snows that had given them birth; recklessly they leaped on, soaked to the skin but with their blood rushing hotly. All day they labored ceaselessly save for an occasional dash to the shore for a cup of steaming coffee and a minute's bask in the heat of the cook's fire, and when night came and the gate fell with a splash they stumbled back to camp drenched and leg weary, but beyond all things famishing for the last, the biggest and the hottest meal of the day. And having eaten ravenously as they sat or stood in steaming groups before the fires, they smoked

a pipe or two, then rolled blankets about their still sodden garments and lay down for a sleep that was akin to the slumber of death.

During the next three days Wilson followed the drive down the river. Lending a hand here and there and watching everything, he saw prodigies of endurance that surpassed anything that had come under his notice in the snow-bound camps. He saw men riding logs that leaped like live things when to lose balance meant a plunge into the rapids amongst death-edged rocks; riding them erect and fearlessly as bare-back performers ride horses over hurdles. He saw them after working for hours in ice water up to their middles crawl numbly forth to seek a fire, only to leap frog-like into the flood again before the ragings of a drive boss. He saw them threading jams and working doggedly beneath towering masses while they located the key log, dislodged it and dropping cant-hooks and peavies go leaping like mountain goats for the shore with death thundering at their heels. And where cant-hook and peavy would not suffice he saw them risking mutilation and death at the fickle

end of a dynamite fuse, and he saw them die in the foam-flecked jaws of Great Bear Rapids—two of them.

At the end of the third day he left the river and cutting across country over ridge and through swamp made his way wet and exhausted to the store. From the top of his stool he once more figured and wrote until the last log had been driven and the paid-off men had dispersed to home or dance hall as their instincts led them strongest. For the two times in the year when the lumber jack's pocket should be lined with money are at the close of the cutting season in the woods and at the end of the drive in the spring. That same afternoon Findlay came into the little office with a contented smile and a rasping together of his rough hands. He slapped his clerk solidly upon the shoulder.

"Everything is all right now, boy. With my fleet anchored where nothing can harm it my work and worry for the season is over. All I have got to do for a few months now is to keep my eyes on the mill and the general run of things. Say, but it feels good to be a gentleman of leisure once more and not have to get up until seven

o'clock in the morning and be able to quit at eight at night. Nothing like it, hey?"

"You have certainly earned a rest."

"That's the way to talk. There is only one thing that is worrying me just this minute and I'm going to tell you what it is. You see Barbara and I had fixed it up to invite you to the house for supper and a couple of hours' visit with us this evening, and I am afraid you won't come."

"But I am going to come."

"Good. To tell the truth I've had Barbara kill that fabulous calf, so you had better be on hand at six-thirty, prepared to do a little fabulous eating." Away went the gentleman of leisure on a dog trot, headed up the road for a spot a mile or two distant in order to inspect some sleds that he had stacked up and left beside the old ice road, while the invited guest finished his afternoon's work and began a simple toilet for the evening. Barbara! And he was to sit at her table and eat again of her cooking. Verily the gods were exceeding kind to him.

And never was there a meal more wonderful. Soup—not intangible broth but real soup, rich as cream, bodyful, soulful, satisfying. Radishes

red as strawberries and pregnant with tingling juices. A roast of veal, stuffed, garnished and spiced until one's eyes could scarcely leave it. Tiny onion bulbs that melted in the mouth and sharpened the teeth of hunger. Baked potatoes that crumbled and fell apart like dry flour, gravy inexpressible. Fritters light as feathers with pure maple syrup from Findlay's own "back yard." Pudding that huge slices of left one as hungry for it as before the first mouthful, and tea fit for the Mikado. And while Findlay and Wilson were raving over each new dish tasted, Barbara, who had cooked everything, sitting at the end of the table with her sleeves tucked above her round white wrists criticized unsparingly. She could do much better as a general thing. She had burned the soup in looking after the roast. She had forgotten to turn the roast in looking after the potatoes. She had taken out the potatoes too soon in her anxiety over the gravy. The fritters had tired her to carry to the table, so heavy were they. The pudding was unsatisfactory and the tea weak. The radishes, onions and syrup she admitted were fairly good. And she would have matters set-

tled no other way than hers despite the honors they would have heaped upon her.

They arose with effort and when they had sought the living room sat down heavily. From the kitchen there came for a while the furious clatter of dishes as they smoked with the contented sloth of the overfed; then Barbara entered and the tri-sided conversation angled many ways. Presently it was discovered that Wilson had friends who knew people whom she had met. Wonderful! In the rapid crossfire of query and comment which followed this miracle John Findlay's tongue ran down and he sat silently, the middle one of the trio, yet a rank outsider. Still on and on their tongues flew and would have stopped when and where there is no telling had not the snap of the silent one's watch case brought them to earth again and to the guilty realization that they had not spoken to him for an hour. But could they have read his thoughts their consciences would have slept again, for internally Findlay was one great silent chuckle.

He arose, Wilson with him. "You remember I have got to leave on the ten o'clock southbound and it is nine-thirty already," was his announce-

ment. "However, I will be back in a few days this time, and after that I will be hanging around here for so long that you will lose your appetites at the mere sight of me." At the door he took Barbara's cheeks between his palms and pursing her lips into a cherry circle kissed them, while Wilson, now rankest of outsiders, looked on enviously. When it came his turn to bid her good evening she dropped her lids as their hands and eyes met simultaneously, curtsied to him in quaint old New England fashion as he paid his final compliment to the meal and told him that she really hoped he would come again. After that the men walked away while she still stood in the doorway with the light streaming about her, and although of course neither knew it, the thoughts of one man were the thoughts of the other. Half way down the hill they heard the door close behind them, immediately followed by a few notes from a song of the olden time, full and sweet as the notes of a mocking bird, succeeded a moment later by an absurdly squeaking whistle. Then Findlay voiced his reflections.

"Mr. Wilson, that girl back there will make

the one who gets her the richest man in America."

"Amen," was the fervent echo.

Findlay walked in silence for a dozen paces and then threw the stub of his cigar into the darkness from which it glared at them like an evil eye. "Now I am going to tell you something. She is afraid of that man Cardiff."

"Any particular reason for fearing him?"

"Not that I know of, yet I believe he is the only man in the world she does fear. And I don't know as I blame her after seeing the look that was on his face the other day at the dam. There was murder blazing there as plain as if it had been printed in letters an inch high. Just why she is afraid of him I don't know, unless it is instinct, for she has never spoken a word about it. But I know it is a fact just the same as I know she would trust you anywhere, for she is her mother's image and I knew her mother as I know myself. I just want to remind you that your guardianship is still in full force and effect during my absence, and I want you to keep an extra close watch on her for the next few days. When I return again I'll relieve you of any

further responsibility along that line. Jumping Jehosophat! Here comes that blamed dog kennel on rollers ten minutes ahead of time. First time that ever happened since they cut up the ark to build it out of. Just swing this lantern a couple of times and I'll hop on her as she trundles past."

A toot came from the advancing engine and its speed sharply diminished. Findlay swung himself aboard the slowly-moving caboose and disappeared within it, leaving the other looking first at the rear lights of the vanishing car and then at the twinkling lights upon the hill. For the first time in many months he had laughed aloud. For the first time in many months he had talked freely out of the very joy of talking. For the first time in many months he had felt happiness. But he well knew the latter feeling would not last. In the fullness of time remorse might die, but regret must live with him forever. Until he could take a living, throbbing heart and placing it within the bosom of Grayford say, "Arise, and walk," happiness could not long abide with him.

CHAPTER XV

THERE came an evening of almost summer's warmth twenty-four hours after Findlay's departure, and Wilson took advantage of it by propping his chair against the door casing in the outer air. Upon one of his knees rested the massive head of old Cæsar, the watchdog of the premises. He was an immense brute of surly but not evil mind, and he respected the commands of but three human beings, John Findlay, Barbara and the new friend who now petted him. Wilson understood dogs and liked them, and rarely had difficulty in quickly making friends with even the most vicious, but it had taken him a solid week of courting before he could gain the great mastiff-hound's confidence. Once done, however, Cæsar's friendship quickly became mild adoration, and now not even the voice of his owner could coax him from Wilson's side. They had often strolled together, the man and the brute with the red shot eyes, and upon certain

bitter nights after the wood fire had burned out and the cold within the store had become acute, they had slept snugly together arm over back and paw over shoulder to their mutual warmth and companionship. Only those who have lived alone in places where the stillness is seldom broken save by the hoot of an owl or the yelp of a wolf can more than faintly understand the almost blood kinship of human kind to the descendants of that brute who untold thousands of years ago came crawling out of the primeval wilderness to lick the foot of a skin-clad savage and dumbly say "my master."

The day had been warm and still, ominously so. A haze was flung across the sky and an oppression lurked in the air that Wilson had been continuously cognizant of, yet had thought little about as he worked on. Ever since morning the horses had been stamping restlessly and several times he had gone to the stable to quiet them, each time finding them white-eyed and nervous. The sun had gone down an hour before glowing like a polished copper disk, with dark clouds mounting high in the west and the leaves of the trees seeming to shiver and curl like sensate

things though no breath of air fanned them. At last Wilson decided that an electrical storm which would probably bring a high wind and a heavy downfall of rain hovered behind the horizon, and had fortified the woodbox with a double armful of dry pine slabs before seating himself by the door to pass the hours that separated him from bed. Partly because of his promise to his employer, but more because his own thoughts ran straight that way, he kept his eyes for the most of the time upon the Findlay cottage. He had not seen Barbara since her father left.

The outlines of the house were lost in the dusk but the window lights shone brightly. Instead of growing chill with the oncoming of darkness the balminess of the air seemed to increase, and the eyes of the watcher half closed as his chin sank drowsily. Then of a sudden his head flew up and Wilson, leaning forward in his chair, tightly gripping the wooden arms, stared ahead of him intently. For the door of the cottage had been suddenly thrown open letting out a flood of light against which had been revealed a towering form whose great shoulders nearly filled the opening from jamb to jamb. For an

instant it had stood there plainly visible, then vanished behind the panel, whether entering with or without the bidding of the one within the watcher had been unable to determine. A second more and Wilson had crossed the tracks and was hurrying up the hill.

Cautiously he approached the cottage and stopped within earshot to listen. The shame of eavesdropping goaded him to retreat but his solemn promise to John Findlay held him still. At least there could be no harm in remaining long enough to find out if Cardiff was a welcome visitor, for if such were the case no promise could make him listen longer. For the first half minute he heard nothing; then voices arose that grew louder and more intense; the exclamations of a woman and the bass notes of a full-chested man. Deeper boomed the tones of the woodsman and higher arose the voice of the girl until there was no mistaking their import. Barbara was frightened and expostulating; Cardiff angry and threatening. Wilson stepped to the door and rapped sharply.

There was instant silence within, then the sound of quickly falling feet and Barbara pale

as the dead but luminous-eyed threw open the door. Cardiff was standing in the center of the room with his naturally florid face aflame from anger and alcohol, and at his first sight of the newcomer his great hands knotted into maul-like fists and the malice of a devil seemed to glow in his eyes. But the girl was between him and the intruder and slowly his fingers relaxed.

The girl's gasp of relief as her glance rested upon Wilson was quickly followed by a wild rush of words. "Oh, I am *so* glad you called. Come right in. Of course you remember Mr. Cardiff. He happened to be passing and stopped to inquire if I was well. Take this chair. I insist. Shall I get you a chair also, Mr. Cardiff—or *must* you go so soon?" Her whiteness, the almost incoherent rapidity of her speech and the palsied hands of this girl whose *sang froid* in hours of danger had made Wilson marvel, caused him to glare balefully at the one who stood beyond her, and although he made not the slightest hostile movement every muscle was as taut as a coiled spring. Cardiff turned to her.

"Yes, I must go for time is almost priceless to

me to-night," he said with a show of deference. "It is not probable that I will see you again, Miss Findlay. If my words to you to-night have seemed parables, doubtless Mr. Wilson can interpret them." The sneering malignancy of the last sentence caused Wilson to start forward, but the other man without a glance at him picked up his hat from a chair and strode out of the door. Quick as a cat Barbara had closed it behind him and now stood with her back against it as though barring it against all entrance. Wilson placed himself fairly before her.

"I wish you would tell me about it. You know I only ask this in the hope that I may be of some assistance," he said quietly. Her face was still colorless and her hands shaking. Plainly Barbara had undergone an ordeal.

She did not answer him and he took her by the sleeve and led her to a chair, making her sit in it and placing himself a yard away. "Tell me," he went on with calm insistence. "Your father commended you to my care in his absence and I think I should know about this affair to-night that I may know how to act in the future. Are you going to tell me?" She had grown

quieter now and her color was returning and she even smiled faintly.

"Yes, I will tell."

"Very well. I am listening but I do not hear."

"I am about to begin. I don't like Mr. Cardiff."

"I am content. Go ahead, please."

"And I never did and I never will."

"I am still not displeased."

"And I have always been afraid of him, too. I don't know why, because he has always been courteous to me before to-night, but I presume it was because he is so big and tremendously strong. And then, too, when I would say little things that he did not like, such an ugly look would come into his eyes. I always felt so tiny and helpless down there at his feet—like a mouse feels before a mastiff, I guess. All he would have to do would be to make one little snap and then where would I be!"

"Has he annoyed you much?"

"No, because I always tried to avoid him. But he used to meet me in such out-of-the-way places; gathering ferns in the woods; strolling

along the tote roads; taking little sun baths in the opens—even on railroad velocipedes. The next day after we met him up the track he sent me a note asking if he might call. I told him that I thought it would be useless as I never attended to any of daddy's business and I was sure he would only waste his time. But to-night he came, seeming to be half intoxicated and excited—anyway acting queerly—and what on earth do you suppose he wanted me to do?"

"Marry him, of course."

"Yes, but in such a queer way. He said he had a horse outside and he wanted me to go with him that very instant. Think of it! Of course I only laughed and said I did not want to be carried away like a cat in a bag. Then he grew angry and said he would take me anyway. That gave me quite a fright, but I pretended to become angry also and told him I would die first. Then he scared me almost out of my wits. He said I would die if I didn't go with him. I could feel my knees getting weak, and I was many times more frightened of him than I was of the wolves that night. But I tried to look formidable and asked him if he was coward

enough to attack a woman. He swore he would not harm a hair of my head for all the money and kings and queens and jacks and other rubbish in the world, and swore it so earnestly that I really believed him. Then he went rambling on with some wild talk about having come to save me from some great, mysterious danger that he alone knew of, and if I would go with him and marry him he would die for me. I thought he was trying to frighten me again, and told him I did not like dead things around the house, and I would rather he died for someone else, anyway. Then he became awfully threatening once more and just then you came. What brought you?"

"I saw him against the light when the door opened."

Barbara grew very perpendicular in her chair, the shadow of displeasure darkening her eyes. "So you were watching to see if I had callers? I had no idea that my neighbors were so interested in me," she returned with much haughtiness. Then her manner changed abruptly. "I won't have people watching me. I can take care of myself."

"Undoubtedly. I am very sorry that I came."

He started to arise but her hand was upon his sleeve in a twinkling.

"You know I did not mean what I said. I am always saying something that I don't mean—and somehow you manage to misunderstand everything anyway. What I meant was—" she paused and averted her face. It was seldom that Barbara became confounded in her speech but now her tongue stumbled awkwardly. Wilson hastened to her rescue.

"What you meant was you do not mind the act of being watched, but you resent the implication."

"Yes, we will let it rest that way."

"And to clear myself of the suspicion of having meddled—I suppose you know that your father appointed me your guardian when he is away." The girl leaned quickly forward, her face very much in earnest.

"No, I did not know it, and I don't care if he did. I am of age and I don't need a guardian. And if I ever do need one I'll pick him to suit myself whether daddy likes him or not. I absolutely refuse to recognize your authority. You are discharged. There is no need of your

being cross about it, but I mean every word I say."

Wilson got upon his feet and walked to the door. "Then I will bid you good night. I only came here in my official capacity, and that having terminated my stay should certainly terminate with it. Just a word more. I don't believe any danger threatens you; I cannot conceive that any can. Cardiff was merely drunk and bluffing. But perhaps it would be well to lock up tight and put that gun by your bed. If you see or hear anything that alarms you, fire it and I will be here within two minutes, unofficially but at your service just the same. Will you promise me that much before you tell me 'good night'?"

She crossed the room and stood close before him. "Please don't get angry," she pleaded. "Let us always be friends. When I say little things on the spur of the moment—forget them—for I value your friendship and solicitude more than I can tell you. And don't think that I have forgotten how much I owe you, even though I object to your guardianship. I will do as you say about the gun. Good night."

He bowed and left her, truthfully vowing that her little outcroppings of impulsiveness troubled him not at all. She closed the door as he reached the foot of the steps and the click of the key in the lock told him that she had remembered that admonition and lost no time in following it. As he reached the base of the hill the form of a man loomed out of the darkness before him and the voice of Cardiff came to his ears in an angry growl.

"Now you—I've got you and I'm going to crack every bone in your carcass for an eaves-dropping, meddling cur." In the crack of a whip Wilson had sidestepped the oncomer wide and was sending him his stern warning.

"Cardiff, keep away from me. I have no quarrel with you and I only wish to go my way unmolested. But bear this in mind. I am not going to run."

"You'll have nothing but broken legs to run on," gritted the other with a rush and the uplifting of a bludgeon filled fist. But the blow was wasted by the back spring of the one assailed, and Cardiff in the midst of repeating the rush paused abruptly with the club poised in mid air.

For a huge, red-eyed brute leaping from out of the darkness crouched before him with white fangs bared and throat filled with mutterings. It was Cæsar, the cross-bred mastiff-hound, who sniffing along the trail of his absent master had seen the blow and with neck bristling with rage had leaped to the defense of his comrade and keeper. The slightest aggressive movement on the part of the one so suddenly brought to bay and the long teeth would be tearing his flesh, and none knew it better than did Cardiff. Motionless he stood with club in air.

"Down, dog," yelled Wilson as he gripped his champion by the iron-spiked collar. "Down, I say." The mutterings grew lower and the brute sullenly sank upon his belly, but his red eyes still glowed fiendishly at the man before him. Wilson straddling the dog gripped him firmly and addressed his enemy once more.

"You had better leave as quietly and as quickly as you know how. As I told you a moment ago I do not want to quarrel with you, but in addition I will tell you this. Despite your size I care for you not at all. The bigger a man is the easier he is to hit, and the heavier he is

the harder he will fall. Furthermore, while I have to be responsible for my own acts, I cannot be bound by what this dog may do to you if I am compelled to loosen him." And Cardiff, judge enough of men to know that this one before him was not an enemy to be despised even by one as mighty as himself, and knowing further that to face the rage of Cæsar in action would be to face a raging fiend whose jaws could crack the bones of an ox, backed slowly away until the curtain of night was well drawn between him and the formidable pair. But from the distance his voice returned to them.

"I would have saved the woman but she would not have it so and now you do it if you can. And I would have broken your neck for eaves-dropping and interfering had it not been for your damned hound—but even that is unnecessary. You may be smiling at me now, but you will think hard of what I have said before you see another night. Lumberman, bah! You don't know the letter 'A' of the woods alphabet or you would understand what I am trying to tell you now. You may have her, but you won't keep her long. Good-by, and to hell with you."

The dull thud of a horse's hoofs followed his words, then silence.

Wondering if more than mere braggadocio lay back of the great woodsman's warning and curse, Wilson sought his bed with the resolve to sleep with one eye on the star-like night light of the cottage and with both ears set to catch the warning report of the gun. Commanding Cæsar to "watch sharp" he went to bed divested only of his hat, coat and boots.

CHAPTER XVI

THE scream of a horse in the stable and the deep, bell-like boom of Cæsar's voice brought Wilson from his light slumber and onto his feet in a twinkling. His first coherent thought as he leaped from his bed was that he was coughing, the second that the room was flooded with a light that was neither the white light of the moon nor the ruddy light of day, but rather a scarlet glare that lay upon floor and wall and reddened them until they looked as though they had been bathed with arterial blood. He rushed to the window and gazed out. To north, to east, to west—more than half the horizon—arose a solid wall of flames that leaped heavenward like the waves of a frantic sea, while above it rolled and twisted fantastic volumes of yellow smoke, fearful in their contortions as they writhed upward until they were lost in the vast ink black canopy that overhung the clearing. Sucked from out of the fire vortex and hurled

aloft by the upward rush of red hot air, myriads of fragments of burning bark and foliage shot across the tumbling smoke volumes; then sailing onward with the wind fell far ahead of the main body of the fire to start other blazes that raced like red serpents through the brush. And these serpents having found another forest giant licked its feet for an instant with their forked tongues, then wound themselves about it and climbed to the lower foliage, leaped upon it with a hiss, devoured it, roared upward through the branches until the pine became a swaying skyscraping torch from which was sown again more living seeds of fire to soar and race and breed until the vast forest should become but a charcoal waste, or the one enemy that could conquer it came to beat out its life to the thunders of the cloudburst. On three sides of Archer—all save the south—the seething arc was drawn closely, and the fate of the hamlet was settled beyond all mortal intervention. As yet the fire was miles away, but it was closing in with the speed of a galloping horse.

For half a dozen seconds Wilson stood staring at onrushing death, rooted to the floor by

very awe. From out of the boarding house he saw men come rushing into the blood-red glare and go running frantically to the south, clothed only as they had slept, yelling at each other with the hoarse voices of men who battle on the verge of eternity. In the stable the horses were fighting with hideous screams. Cæsar's voice tolled incessantly, and down the railroad track a wild-eyed buck came leaping over the ties, all fear of man forgotten in his terror of a still more cruel enemy. Through the window a rush of air hot as the pant of an exhausted brute, fanned the face of the watcher, and in a moment when other sounds happened for the instant to cease he heard a dull roar like the far off breaking of surf. Six precious seconds he had wasted in awe-stricken inactivity, but now he leaped into action.

Fortunate indeed it had been for him that pondering over Cardiff's warning and rendered uneasy by the mystery of it, he had laid himself down to sleep nearly fully dressed. Cap and coat he threw on in a twinkling, his boots in two seconds more, and not stopping to lace them he ran for the stable with his plan for

escape taking shape as he went. He would release the horses, all but one, mount the last and best and ride to the assistance of the girl had she not already taken the alarm and fled. There would be no time to saddle the plunging beasts in the stable and she could not ride bareback unassisted in the wild race that lay before them, but he could stick on without saddle or bridle and hold her from falling as well. And with a good horse beneath them the chances were about even that they might burst through the gap before the fire circle was made complete; if not—well, it was their only hope.

He threw open the stable door and sprang among the frantic brutes within. It was dangerous work, this putting himself among the fear-crazed animals of the stalls and he well knew that he risked his life in doing it, but upon their fleetness lay the safety of himself and the one person in the world whom he now knew he loved. Iron hoofs beat the floor on all sides of him; heavy bodies jammed him against the stalls and white teeth snatched at him and tore his clothes, but one by one he slashed their fastenings with his knife and sent them galloping without.

The last one he seized by the halter strap, and starting him for the door ran by his side waiting only to pass the low entrance to make the leap upon his back which would be followed by the dash up the hill. The horse upon whom he had placed his trust for the life race was a powerful gray, well broken to the saddle, intelligent and obedient, and Wilson believed that he could handle him with the halter alone. In any event he must attempt it, for he might as well have tried to bridle the fire itself as the half-crazed, plunging beast in the narrow stall.

To plan as well as mortal can and then at the very threshold of success find that he had blundered, and because of that unforeseeable blunder must stand helpless and sweating in the jaws of death has been the fate of many a man. And such was the fate of Wilson as he battled with his chosen beast at the threshold of the stable. For whereas the other brutes had thundered out with wild snorts at being released, the gray one, the docile, the obedient, braced himself at the log sill and with eyes rolling and squeals of terror balked in shivering obstinacy, as insensible to word or blow as a horse of iron.

Desperately Wilson fought him with tongue and toe, but the fire fear had paralyzed the brute's brain and he but screamed and shuddered beneath the cutting whip slashes. For a minute which he would not have sold for all the golden treasures of the earth the man battled with the beast, then giving up the attempt he threw aside the useless strap and went racing up the path that led to the cottage. As he crossed the railroad tracks he heard the roar of a gun and a moment later Barbara, hair streaming and clothed only in skirts, waist and shoes, came darting down towards him. Her face was very white but her dark eyes, filled though they were with keen realization of her desperate peril, were unterrified. The fear that had shaken her the evening before at the mere presence of Cardiff was now in the presence of the fire nowhere visible.

He grasped her arm and side by side they ran. They did not speak, she because she knew that her life depended not upon her tongue but upon her limbs; he because his brain was in a chaos of wild plans that might bring them safety. The girl ran easily, lightly, her lips

compressed and her crooked elbows held close to her sides, while he, his stride somewhat shortened to meet hers, fell into the gait that had won him many a cross-country run. Cæsar came galloping behind.

They turned upon the track where the polished surfaces of the steel rails shimmering in the sky glare ran into the distance until they thinned and thinned and finally vanished as two slowly converging silver threads. And it was down this silvery way alone that safety lay—hard running at best across ties where one must leap with precision or almost inevitably turn an ankle upon itself like a hinge. And now they had scarcely gone fifty yards when luck played them false, for there was a stumble and together they went down. Wilson, holding the girl back as best he could, threw out his free arm and saved himself, but Barbara struck the rail with a force that made her cry out with the pain of it. Instantly he had picked her up, and forgetful of the danger behind was holding her tightly as he begged her to say that she was not badly hurt. Save for the one involuntary cry she was mute, but with lips tightly pressed and mouth

twisted with pain she pushed him from her and pointed to an object that stood close beside the track. It was the man's turn to cry out now and he did, a shout of joy, for not a dozen feet away stood the fleet-wheeled 'pede.

He fell upon the machine tigerishly, lifting one end free and hauling it after him until he dropped it upon the ties, and then with the girl striving courageously to assist him he placed it upon the rails and swung her bodily to her seat. For a few rods he ran pushing behind it as he gave it the initial momentum, then leaped to the seat and seized the handles. The girl was already pumping with all her strength.

And as on that Sunday when exulting in the rush of the wind she had cried "faster, faster," and he had put forth his strength until the cog wheels buzzed, so now with teeth set and eyes glued upon the silver lined pathway he swung back and forth until the car seemed to leap clear of the rails at every pull. Again his muscle-plaited legs and arms were like smooth-working pistons; his body the cylinder that drove them forward and hauled them back to the whirl of the driving gear beneath. Cæsar leaping be-

hind with lolling tongue flattened himself in his flight until his deep chest brushed the ties as he strained every muscle to keep close to the ones he worshiped. Past them on each side the forest sped in a blurred mesh of crimson-flecked undergrowth and interlaced limbs, while the ties of the roadbed beneath them became blended into a solid floor. They were holding their own with the blaze as yet, but it was gaining power with every mile covered while their limbs were growing weaker with every shove. To outrun the fiend behind seemed impossible, but to slacken their efforts was destruction to a certainty. Desperately they labored on.

They rounded a sharp curve and hope well-nigh left them. Borne by the high wind miles ahead of the roaring furnace the flying outriders of the fire had descended ahead of the fugitives and for half a mile on each side of the track the forest was ablaze. Still, run the flame gauntlet they must, or shrinking from the lesser demon in front be withered by the greater one which raced behind. Pungent volumes of smoke that stung eyes and throat and half stifled the breath filled the space between the fire lines, but they

plunged into it with a sprint of speed among stinging sparks that fell upon them in a red hail. Through the smoke on either side they saw as through black screens of gauze great trees, flame-swept from roots to tips, that roared and shot blazing embers at them as they passed. Fierce gusts of heat whirled about them, each breath of which seemed to scorch and shrivel their lungs. Eyebrows and eyelashes disappeared as though rubbed off with an acid, and with hair singed and garments smoking they emerged blistered and half strangled from the gauntlet into the clear air again with all the fire behind them.

But it was a well-nigh barren victory at best and both man and woman knew it well. Once out of the scorch and strangle where pain had goaded them on, their forced speed degenerated to a point where Cæsar, singed from nose to tail and limping along on three scorched feet, kept pace with them without effort. Though for the time being they were well abreast of the foremost fire wall, yet overhead the swiftly flying spark fleets sailed in countless myriads. It would be but a few miles at best before they would have to run another gauntlet like the last, and with

their diminishing strength and powers of resistance each knew the feat would be impossible. And even though they should by some miracle of luck reach the village that was ahead, no safety could be found there, for even then its inhabitants were fleeing for their lives as they themselves now fled. Half stupefied by exhaustion and smoke inhaled, moved by the same despairing thoughts, they eased their efforts until the clatter of the machine dwindled to a measured clack. Then Wilson whose dimmed eyes were searching the wayside uttered a raven-like croak. Close beside the track and with a good half mile of space from shore to shore, impassable save by leaping, to all the fires of earth, lay one of the countless lakes that dot the pineries.

Flashing before his eyes came the scene as John Findlay had painted it, when more than a generation before he and the mother of the girl now beside him, fleeing as they now did, had found safety in the waters of a lake. One sharp pull upon the brake lever and the machine was motionless with the man standing upon the track beside it. Barbara, with the lake in view, needed no words of explanation. From childhood she

had been familiar with the story of her parents' race for life, and the final scene in the lake had been a never-exhausted source of amusement and raillery for her. So often and so vividly had she heard the story told that it seemed to be a part of her own existence, and that she was now but reënacting a dimly remembered scene of some previous life wherein each step before her was a familiar one. Firmly grasping the hand that her companion offered her—he could not have lifted her now—she followed him through the brush and over the fallen trees until they reached the shore opposite the side which the charging enemy would soon claim as its own. Then bathing their hands and faces in the cool waters they sat down to quietly await the inevitable.

In the reflected cloud glow the still bosom of the lake shone like an inverted sky, deep down in whose depths swam myriads of glowing coals. Swarms of cinders fell upon the surface with the hiss of rain drops upon a hot surface, and here and there pieces of blazing bark sputtered and smoked as they drifted slowly on. Cæsar came whimpering up to them and held forth one burnt paw as he appealed to the man to touch it and

make it well as he had often done when a thorn offended, but this time the healer only shook his head helplessly. But the girl's eyes softened at the sight of his sufferings, and forgetful of her own hands which had been badly stung by the hornet-like swarms of sparks, she put her arms around the singed neck and laying her cheek upon his head whispered something to him that the man did not hear. And whether the keen-sensed brute understood from her voice that they were helpless to aid him, or whether the magic of her touch eased the pain and brought him comfort, or whether it was coincidence pure and simple none can say; but be it as it may he lay down at her feet and whimpered no more.

Faster and faster fell the stinging downpour until the fending off of the burning particles became an almost incessant source of activity. Above the top of the black forest that framed the opposite side of the lake they could now see the ragged fire crest leaping, and across the water bellying balloons of smoke dragged that were half in air and half resting upon the surface. Far above their heads were rushing winds, but upon the lake's bosom the air was motionless.

Then as they watched and waited a red serpent came writhing through the low growth of the far bank until it reached the water's edge where it flattened itself, coiled, spread like an adder and pausing for a moment to flick the rough skin of a pine with its tongue ran nimbly up the trunk and along the boughs to the foliage which at its touch burst into a roar. Then on either side other fire serpents came crawling, and in five minutes more the shore line was a seething mass whose fiercely-beating heat and belching volumes of sparks and smoke caused the man to hide his face in his arms and the woman to shield herself behind an outer skirt. The crisis had arrived, but the worst of the crisis was yet to come.

"To the water," gasped Wilson and she arose upon the instant and putting her hand once more in his waded by his side into the last refuge between them and eternity. The waters were cold and they caught their breath from the sudden chill of them as they waded out until half submerged. "Now sit down," he commanded, and she obeyed; gasping sharply as the arms of the lake closed about her shoulders. At once he seated himself beside her and with the water up

to their necks they waited the beginning of the end; having done all that man and woman could do and regretless of mistake in judgment or opportunity wasted. Their wetted handkerchiefs they bound about their mouths and noses that the cloths might mitigate the heat and clarify the air which they must breath when the smoke clouds came, and their hair they saturated to protect their heads from the raining cinders. With sticks they pushed away the floating fire masses when they came too close, and when the deluge of cinders matted in their hair and became unbearable Wilson remedied that trouble by removing his saturated coat and spreading it over their heads until only their faces were exposed. This of course brought them close side by side and he released her hand for a better and more supporting clasp about the waist. Around them in slow circles Cæsar was paddling, thrusting his head beneath the surface from time to time when the hot embers lighted upon it.

The conflagration reached its zenith. Fifty feet above the tops of the great pines the red tongues of the flames licked the skies, then severing themselves from the mass below leaped still

higher and vanished like flaunting crimson banners whipped out of sight behind tumbling copper masses. The lake shone like burnished brass. Fiercer the heat grew and volumes of pitch smoke rolling heavily over the lake drove the huddled pair to draw the sodden garment completely over them, leaving them in a shallow, mist-filled tent with the waters circling their throats. Through the chill of the lake upon their bodies and the heat upon their heads and the difficulty of breathing their sufferings were acute, yet they could endure it for a while longer should it get no worse, and it could get no worse save one last thing happened. But happen that last thing did. The fire leaped the lake bodily and catching among the trees that fringed their side of the waters not a dozen yards from where they crouched went shooting upward and began to focus its heat upon them from point blank range. In ten minutes more there would be a roaring inferno so close at hand that no flesh and blood could endure its blast, and when that moment came their lives must go out, either withered by flame or strangled by the waters that so coldly embraced them. One privilege only remained to

them. They could choose the element in which to die.

For an instant the man lifted a flap of the coat and showed her what lay before them that she might understand and choose when the unendurable moment came. She understood, nodded and he let the soaked flap fall. And then with no hope of life remaining his great love and pity for her overmastered him and he threw his arms around her and drew her against his breast, kissing her wet forehead, her wet lips and cheeks as he told her that he loved her better than life itself, and that to go to eternity with her tightly clasped was to rob death of half its hideousness. And hearing his words faintly above the roar of the fire she surrendered herself to him, and throwing one arm about his neck as if to hold him placed her cheek against his and sobbed brokenly.

It was a night of years. As in that fearful holocaust many lives were lost that would have been saved but for the sheer accursedness of fate; so upon the other hand others were saved that by the laws of chance should have been forfeited. Flint the indomitable, hero of a score

of hair's breadth escapes, together with Lebeau and half a dozen companions fought the fire skillfully and long, then when safety was almost within their grasp died through an unforeseeable freak of the fire element. The man and woman in the lake were among the blest. Above them a flying bolt suddenly rent the murk like a flimsy fabric rent by strong hands and the mighty lungs of the heavens drowned the voice of the fire as the roar of a lion drowns the hiss of a serpent. Bellowing in his wrath at the wantonness of the fire slave run mad below, the great storm king came, and from out of the rent in the clouds poured a deluge that swept the leaping flames from the face of the earth; beating the writhing serpents into motionless, blackened shapes; spearing the sparks in mid flight and cooling the seared bosom of the earth like a soothing balm. Within thirty minutes the red woods had become black, with water streaming through the channels the fire had made, and where there had been billows of live smoke were now but dead smudges. Roasting heat had given way to steam and humidity, and only here and there in some hollow tree or beneath protecting log or brush heap

could be found the remains of the great fire army, and these scattered survivors, now beaten to masses of flickering coals, were impotent save for feeble darts and venomous hissings.

From out of the lake crawled a man, a woman and a dog, all scorched, soaked and shaken with the chill of the water; a trio that searched out a still glowing stump and gathered about it in a bedraggled circle as they sought the heat from which the moment before they had cringed in suffering. The torrents from above were warm and gave them little discomfort, but had the rain which had saved them now turned about and drowned them they would have died blessing it so great was their thankfulness. Through the rest of the night and far into the next day the downpour continued, then the woods being sufficiently cool to be traversed the three sought the railway and stumbled stiffly over the charred ties and twisted rails as they bent their steps towards the southern edge of the hideous blackened woods. Five miles down the track they met the first of the living; a scouting hand-car closely followed by a construction train that bore new ties and rails for the repair of the road. The

fugitives were nearly exhausted—Barbara could only walk with the aid of Wilson, who himself had little strength to lend—and they were at once joyfully placed upon the hand-car and whisked to Phoenix, the village nearest to the southern rim of the fire area.

CHAPTER XVII

SEVERAL days later John Findlay and Wilson dismounted from the reconstruction train at the site of what had been the hamlet of Archer. The clearing was but a desolate waste now, heaps of ashes and charred logs marking the spots where once had stood store, boarding house, stable and mill. Where there had been but so few days before a magnificent woodland now remained but a grotesque, blackened jungle out of which arose countless barren poles which had once been towering green-capped trees but which no longer bore resemblance to anything but the charred masts of an endless fleet of hulks. Of the cottage on the hill scarcely a vestige remained.

Together the sober-faced pair inspected the tangled wreckage of the mill machinery and then sat down upon a heap of scrap iron that had cost Findlay thousands of dollars. And the

logger, relighting his cigar for the tenth time since leaving the train, spoke for the first.

"Well, boy, I'm busted, cleaned out, wiped off the map slick and clean. Kind of tough at my age, ain't it; just when I had got things started my way after thirty years of bucking snow and ice. Damn the luck anyway. If it wasn't for the girl, I'd wish the fire had got me along with Flint, Lebeau and the rest of the boys. Makes a man weak and discouraged and sick all over to see his best friends and the results of a lifetime of labor all go up in one bonfire. Sometimes I feel as if I wanted to sit down and cry. I'm done for, all right, this time."

"How about the insurance?" ventured the listener, hoping to bring forth something upon which he could base a few words of cheer. Findlay shook his head.

"We fellows don't go in much for insurance, and we could not get much of it if we did. The companies don't want the risk and charge us accordingly. Had a little here and there—just about enough to pay up what I owe. But the worst of it is I haven't got a stick of live stuff standing. It cleaned out all my holdings that

were to be my bread and butter in the years to come, and leaves me with a lot of burnt-over land that won't be worth the taxes during my lifetime. You can see now why I was so hot to get my cut stuff out of the woods this spring. If it had laid over I'd have lost that too, and that would have put me 'way in the hole. But thank the Lord the way it turned out I don't have to start in owing anything. You see I'd just about got everything paid for, and with my camps built and paraphernalia and timber holdings all clear, I could have cleared up a comfortable little fortune in the next five years and retired to town to give Barbara the right kind of a send-off in the world. But now I'm smashed so flat you could shove me under a door without scraping anything."

"You don't mean to say you are penniless, Mr. Findlay," was the anxious rejoinder. The one addressed lighted his cigar again.

"Yep, pretty near. The way I figure things out is this. My insurance will pay my little personal bills. My logs will pay the rest of what I owed on my holdings. My camp up on Lone Creek through some funny work on the part of

the wind got skipped in the general bonfire and I've got six good horses up there—all that I have left out of over sixty. I can sell four of those and they ought to bring me eight hundred. Two I will keep and next winter I can hire out with them in the woods for the Badger Company, the same as I did about the time you were first beginning to sit up and notice things. Old Meyer will hire me just to have the satisfaction of bossing me around, and I can earn enough for a few years yet to keep the girl comfortable. By the time I get too old for the woods she will probably hitch up with some young fellow and then I'll make them adopt me. So you see I'm all right after all. But I am kind of worried about you. What are you going to do—you're so darned young and inexperienced?"

"I hadn't given it a thought. Go to work for the Badger Company too, I suppose. What else can I do?"

Findlay wheeled suddenly about and slapped his companion heartily upon the back. "By gosh!" said he as he puffed vainly at his unlighted cigar. "Gimme a match. That reminds me that I owe you for your winter's work.

Everybody else drew on me in full and I thought my men were all paid up. Well, I'm mighty glad I owe you enough to help you out, for I can realize on those horses." Wilson's face flushed.

"Mr. Findlay," he returned warmly. "If you ever offer me that money again I'll jam it down your throat."

"Then I'll mail it to you," grinned the other. But the look upon his companion's face caused the grin to die young.

"No, you won't, unless you wish to make bad feelings. You may think you owe me a couple of hundred, but as a matter of fact I owe you more than money can ever repay. You have absolutely no idea what you did for me that day when you hired me, a city greenhorn who could not earn his keep, in preference to any one of a town full of able woodsmen. And you only did it because I told you a hard luck story. And furthermore, you have treated me all the way through as a man and an equal; invited me to your home; honored me with the protection of your daughter, and if you ever say anything to me again about wages I'll—"

Findlay leaped to his feet and seizing the

speaker by the collar shook him until the victim's head spun. "Talk to me about your owing me anything, will you, you degenerate!" he yelled. "Didn't you drag my girl out of that wolf gang and pack her home in your arms through snow a hundred feet deep? And didn't you chase that pup Cardiff ki-yi-ing into the woods when he insulted her. And didn't you save her from being burned to a cinder only last week? Talk to me about being in my debt and I'll rub your nose in this blooming charcoal pile until it looks like a burnt potato. If I hadn't got burned out I'd have done business hereafter under the firm name and style of John Findlay & Co., and you'd have been the Co. Now shut up."

He released his hold and sat down grumbling. Presently Wilson handed him a match without speaking, as a peace offering, and Findlay began puffing again. Finally he spoke.

"But I'll tell you what I wish you would do for me free gratis. I'm kind of dazed and want to sit around on my thumb for a week and see if I can dig anything worth having out of this charcoal pile of mine. And I'm so nervous I

hate to have Barbara out of my sight. I wish you would—and mind you I ain't going to offer you any money for it for I ain't used to eating small change—I wish you would hike over to Lone Creek and keep your eye on those horses until I can get someone to relieve you. Will you?"

"Glad to. Do I need to take anything with me?"

"Not a thing but an ax on your back for emergencies along the road. The camp is full of grub. But you had better move on so as to make it before dark." He got up and went slowly away, hands deep in pockets and puffing thoughtfully, while Wilson securing an ax from the construction train turned his face to the east.

He left the clearing and entered the Lone Creek trail. The last time he had passed this way the full wealth of the great forest had been spread before him. Trailing arbutus with its waxen leaves running everywhere; ferns delicate as webs bowing their slender necks across the trail to brush his boots as he passed; maples showering soft leaves silently down to carpet his path; cedars scenting the way and pines whispering to

him incessantly. The wild life of the woods had been about him, too. Grunting porcupines ambling away and hitching themselves up the trunks like bear cubs; ravens that screamed at him from lofty look-outs, squirrels and chipmunks, jack-birds and jays, hawks and partridges, with now and then bands of deer, the bucks hornless and running light, the does fawn-bearing and heavy, leaping away with white flags aloft and vanishing in a dozen bounds amongst living green so dense that no eye could follow them. But where all this had been he now threaded a tangle of sodden mounds and flame-licked trunks with the black dust arising in angry clouds about his knees and the sunlight beating hot upon him through the skeleton limbs of the forest dead; himself the only moving thing on ground or in the air; the land as lifeless as an alkali desert or land of lava. Loving nature well and with keen eyes and nose for its offerings, Wilson could have wept at the shame of it. For the grand woodland that he had grown to love was gone for all time. The manifold seeds of forest life that had been sown by the winds in the beginning and nursed through countless cen-

turies by sun and rain into a wondrous family of stiff-spined giants and swaying lesser growth, had been blighted root and branch in a single night, irreparably and forever. Fire had been the destroyer, the grub hook and the plow would be the sextons.

A creek far too wide to leap and of uncertain depth barred his way and he skirted it with eyes fastened upon the ground. A few months before he would have been puzzled as to how to negotiate this paltry thing across which he might have tossed a stone, but now the problem was simply resolved into finding that for which he searched. And a few rods further on he came upon it; a fallen tree of suitable size lying close to the bank. Ten minutes of ax swinging and he had cut a section from the butt, and with a cut sapling used as a lever and a stone for a fulcrum he rolled the log into the stream and ran sure-footedly to its center. Then using his sapling as push-pole he shoved himself across, delicately poised, and alighting unwet pursued his way through the sooty dust that squirted from under his soles at each step like black powder puffs from pistols.

Six miles of this brought him to the edge of the unburnt tract, a miraculously preserved oasis in a desert of death; green and sweet scented; standing out with fourfold its wonted vividness against the charcoal background. The lone man who had watched this camp after the breaking up of its crew had fled before the fire to the refuge of the river without taking time to loose the brutes imprisoned in the stable, by which misjudgment he had lost his life and the animals had been saved. Wilson emerging from the charcoal and smut of the burnt territory onto the rich grass, stamped his feet free of soot and whisked his legs into a semblance of cleanliness with a green branch as he advanced upon the camp buildings. From within the stable came the furious barking of a dog, and the visitor calling a pacific greeting slowly opened the door. With a weasel-like dart through the orifice there came a handsome red setter who skirted the newcomer at a safe distance as he racketed tremendously from between his bared white teeth. Silently the man eyed him until the crescendo of barks had dwindled into a broken series of gruff grunts, then held out his hand. The brute sank

until his belly was upon the ground, and with jaws resting upon his outstretched paws eyed the newcomer sharply.

"Good dog," said the man heartily. The tail twitched a bit.

"Come here," commanded Wilson as he squatted also and snapped his fingers before the other. Keenly the setter studied his face and then with a whine wiggled a few feet forward.

"Nearer, boy," urged he of the outstretched hand. His tone was half command, half appeal, and the dog crawling close laid his head submissively on the boot before him. Gently, as caressingly as he might have stroked a woman's tresses, he ran his hand over the glossy head and silken ears until the four-footed one arose and placing his fore paws upon the bent knees of the man laughed full in the face above him. And in that moment Wilson had made another enduring friendship.

The horses he found none the worse for their experience with the heat and smoke but suffering keenly from thirst. From the river near at hand he brought as much water as he dared let them drink and fed them double rations. Then

he descended upon the cook shanty. Provisions he found in abundance in barrels and upon the shelves, but it was the setter who with nose eagerly outstretched led him straight to the root cellar with its hoarded meat supply. The meal finished and the horses bedded down and well rubbed, the camp watcher perched himself upon a pile of split wood near the cook shanty and sat plunged deep in thought until the moon, balloon-round, came sailing through the forest of poles to arouse him to a realization of his weariness. With the deeply-drawn sigh of one who had pondered long and vainly over some unsolvable problem he entered the bunkhouse, closed the door and threw himself upon the blankets.

The dull throbbing of his brain granted him no rest. From side to side he rolled as he stretched his arms into the darkness as though that for which he craved was a thing tangible that hovered there. Not since the first few hours following his crime, when he had fought between the alternative of flight with its open confession of guilt, and surrender to a living burial which he felt he did not deserve, had he been so brain-racked as now. Endlessly his thoughts went

over the events of the last few days; the nightmare-like flight before the fire; the shivering, choking night in the lake with his sacred avowal of a love that was greater than love of his own life—a passion which would endure as long as breath remained within him. Again he seemed to feel the clinging of her arms as she sobbed, not at the fear of death as death, but at the parting; her tear-wet cheek pressed to his; and lifting his palms to his aching eyes he found his own cheeks now wet as hers had been. He would never have told her of his love had he believed even the slightest chance of life remained. But with all hope abandoned, the seal of silence that had bound his lips had burst before the wild longing to tell her all before the light went out that she might understand why he held her so tightly. He had known that his own passing would be the easier if he bore her with him; hers none the harder for being borne, so he had spoken and she with the jaws of death closing upon them had opened her woman's heart and taken him within it. But they had lived after all. His fingers buried themselves in the blanket in an agony of helplessness. What would she think

of him if after those words, burning as the fire itself, and after having consecrated herself to him at the very threshold of eternity, he, now free, should recant them or say no more? What would any woman think of a man like that? "Hound" would be a compliment; "cur" rank flattery; "liar unspeakable" alone adequate. Yet he had no more right to ask her to marry him than he had to demand that she cut off her right hand. Even should he murder his conscience and take her to him only misery and shame could result. Some day he would be discovered and torn from her to leave her a convict's widow, or if with children—

The ceaseless gnaw of some sharp-toothed creature near the door rasped on his nerves like the filing of a saw and he shouted for the beast to go away. For a moment following his cry the sound ceased, then continued without cessation until he could no longer endure it. Picking up an ax handle he sprang out into the moonlight. A porcupine whirled from some grease-covered object that it had been gnawing and went lumbering away with quills threatening. Deep into the darkness he drove the disturbing

beast with sharp pokes of his weapon that set the short tail to flicking wickedly, and then as he returned chanced to remember that he had not seen the setter since feeding him. Raising his voice he called to him, and the voice failing to bring a response he whistled shrilly upon his fingers. From far within the blackened skeleton forest came frenzied barkings followed by the howl of a wolf as he ran the waste in search of half-cooked carcasses. Again and again the man shrilled his call, but the dog only responded by renewed barkings until at last Wilson returned to his blankets with the fervent prayer that now sleep might come to him. And eventually it did, but with the fitfulness of slumbers, made unresting by the shapes of the dark land of semi-consciousness.

But his troubles for the night were not yet over. Scarcely it seemed had he closed his eyes than he was awakened by the thud of a heavy body leaping upon the low roof, followed by the rattle of long claws as the beast possessing them made his way over the tar-paper-covered boards. From end to end of the long building the intruder pattered and rattled until the awak-

ened one below once more crawled from his bunk. From a pair of deer horns he took the abandoned rifle of his predecessor, and feeling his way to the door slipped without. Around the corner of the building he went stealthily and then paused to look up. The moon was gone, but against the star-sprinkled sky he could make out the dim outline of a wolfish creature that stood upon the ridge pole with red eyes fastened upon him. He raised his gun until the barrel covered the form, but in the act of pulling the trigger paused to reflect. The idea of a wolf on the roof seemed preposterous—a cat creature would not have been so improbable—but the retractile claws of a cat creature do not rattle whereas the stiff toe nails of a wolf do. Again he was in the very act of firing when with an excited yelp the setter came bounding down from the ridge pole and leaping to the ground disappeared yelling into the darkness. The next second the astonished listener heard a snarl and the sounds of a chase that ended in a long-drawn howl and the sudden reappearance of the dog all abristle. And it was not until after several nights of observation and putting things together that Wil-

son learned that all these strange proceedings were but the incidents of a dare-devil game of hide and seek invented by the dog to while away the time. As night came he would seek the edge of the forest and by his challenges draw the wolves around him until the limit of recklessness was reached, whereupon he would flee across the clearing and leaping upon the low roof where he knew no wolf dared follow, bay them to his heart's content.

Wilson remained at the camp alone save for the dog and horses for a week, pacing his island around Crusoe-like and for the most of the time lost in thought. But when relief came and he went back to mankind his mind had been made irrevocably. He had fled from the law telling himself that he went in order that he might in his freedom and through the sweat of his brow do a man's work in the world; sacrificing himself should opportunities come that others might be made happier, and he would see to it that that self-promise had been no thin disguise to cover cowardice. He had lived simply, cleanly, manfully, and had reaped the reward that such a life brings. He had repented in suffering,

learned fortitude and calmness, and now felt that he could bear whatever fate held in store for him as John Findlay had borne his great misfortune; as Barbara had borne hers. By means of his money he could once more start the old logger in a business employing hundreds of workers who in turn by their toil would provide for other hundreds unable to work but who yet must live. By means of his money the lumberman's trail could be cleared so broad and smooth that he could walk it without fear or care until he could walk no more; and by means of his money Barbara could and should come into her own. As for himself—well, he would have made all the reparation that a man could make, and with his conscience at rest he would put himself fearlessly into the scales. He had justified his flight, and in the consciousness of having done so he strode on fearlessly. Purposely he swung his feet far as he strode. They would soon be doing the narrow lock-step.

CHAPTER XVIII

UPON the evening of his arrival in town, Wilson rapped on the door of the modest little boarding house in Phoenix where John Findlay and Barbara had secured quarters. There were no servants to open the doors of boarding houses in Phoenix when callers came, that duty devolving upon any inmate of the place who heard the rap and felt inclined to answer it. Barbara sitting alone in the little parlor and trying to read, heard the familiar footfalls coming up the steps and with a quick catching of her breath threw down the paper and listened with straining ears for the summons upon the panel. She had not seen him since the day he had brought her bedraggled and singed into Phoenix, and now it seemed as though she must choke, so great was the upward bound of her heart. Her father had explained the cause of his absence, and it was with the knowledge that he would soon return to her, not with death but with life

before them now that had made the past week the happiest of her life despite her grief over the logger's misfortune. For what mattered the money loss after all with this strong man, this indomitable and ever-resourceful one committed to their cause? Happiness would be theirs from the start, and fortune would be powerless to long resist him. He was irresistible; impossible of denial; all-compelling. Her confidence in him was as great as her confidence in immortality.

The knock fell, not with his usual frank request for admission, but with the half-hearted tapping of a country lover who frightened at his temerity has half a mind to round about before the summons can be answered. Opening the door she stood before him. She made no move to make right of way that he might enter, but stood fairly in his path with her face upturned and her eyes and lips smiling into his, thinking—what does any honest woman think when the man to whom she has given her heart comes to her with the first avowal of his love for her scarcely a week old on his lips! Her mouth rich and sweet as any mouth that ever tempted man was so near his own that a mere bending of his

neck would have sufficed, but he steeled himself against its offering and without speaking took her hands in his and led her to a sofa. Barbara, failing to understand his wordless greeting and dull eyes, grew cold with the apprehension of ill news to come. Had something dreadful happened—or had he with life and freedom once more before him come to tell her that his words were lies; that his love had burned out with the fire and that his caresses were but mockeries? She slipped her hands from his with a stiffening of the fingers that forbade any effort to retain them and sat looking at him askance as distrust of him for the first time crawled into her soul. As for him, he wiped his brow nervously and sought again almost mechanically to close her fingers within his own. She shook the touch off as she might have ridden herself of a crawling insect, shrinking a little as though the insect had been a particularly obnoxious one. Wilson sought to clear his voice by a dry cough, but when he spoke she scarcely recognized his own tones.

“Have you been well, Barbara?”

"Quite. And you?"

"Not very. In fact I am in trouble—great trouble, Barbara." In the quick sympathy for him that swelled within her it was now her hand, not his, that did the searching.

"Tell me," she pleaded.

His glance dropped and he sat staring at the floor, staring until she grew frightened and spoke again. "I will think it unkind of you if you do not tell me. Perhaps I might be of some little aid or comfort. Cannot you trust me?" The man aroused himself and turned his face towards hers.

"Barbara, believe me it is too painful to talk about. Merely I am going away to-morrow forever. That is all I can say now, but later on you shall know all about it. I have come to-night on business—business with your father. Is he here?"

"Going away forever—and you wish to see father! Nothing more?"

"Nothing more." The words came from him as a condemned man might have spoken them from the trap before the hood was drawn.

Without another word she arose and started across the room, the scarlet of shame flaming in her cheeks. He sprang after her.

"Barbara—Barbara! one moment. Don't misunderstand me—don't judge me to-night. Wait until you have heard from me, I beg you. I meant what I told you that night; every word; every touch as much as a man can mean. Wait—" But her knuckles were beating a tattoo upon a door and from within already came the sound of John Findlay's voice demanding what was wanted. The girl's voice was absolutely emotionless as she made her reply.

"Mr. Wilson has called to see you. Please come at once." Then she faced him with her back against the wall and her chin held high. Incongruous as was the thought, in that instant she reminded him of a thoroughbred that he had once struck with a whip; the poise of her graceful head held high in anger and wounded pride being the poise of the thoroughbred's to a hair.

He sank back in his seat looking at her reproachfully. "You should have listened to me for a moment," he said at last.

"But you said there was nothing more."

The silence fell after that and twenty seconds ticked themselves into the irredeemable. Then the door opened and Findlay came forth with hand outstretched and sincere greeting upon his lips. "Glad to see you back, boy. What's the racket. Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, I would like to speak to you. I thought perhaps you might like to take a walk—" he turned to the girl. "That is if Miss Barbara will pardon such discourtesy." She nodded indifferently.

"I most certainly have no desire to listen to business secrets. Permit me to leave the parlor in your possession," she returned as she sought the narrow stairs. But Wilson's quick protest backed by her father's half command caused her to pause.

"No, daughter. Men can talk business to better advantage as they loaf around out of doors. More room for their brains to expand, you see. Besides I want to smoke my pipe," said Findlay as he opened the street door and passed out. Wilson upon the threshold sent her a look of appeal that she judge him not until

she knew the whereof of it all, but her eyes were as unresponsive as the eyes of a sphynx. He had sworn that he loved her beyond life itself and had begged that she give him but some little token that she cared for him in return; and in that moment she had committed herself to his arms to hold and be held as long as life remained, yet now, the next time she saw him it was but to hear the cold avowal that he was going away forever. There was nothing more to be said or done. Looks, words, partings were worse than useless. It would be better if even thought could be banished.

Outside Findlay lighted his pipe. "Go on," he puffed. With his chin dropped to his bosom Wilson nerved himself to the effort.

"I have considerable to say to you, Mr. Findlay. Can you spare me half an hour?"

"As long as you wish. I am a gentleman of leisure now for sure. Nothing gone wrong I hope."

"Nothing has happened since the fire. I am going away by the morning train and I am not coming back."

The elder man paused in his stride to face the

speaker. "That's bad, and I am mighty sorry to hear it. Still, I suppose I should not be surprised. This country has gone to hell and I can't hire you any longer, so of course it isn't a bad time to clear out. But you don't need to go far, and it doesn't have to be forever. By some interposition of that party who always looks after his own, the Badger Company got off with a scorch and a scare and they will need as many men as ever next season. No trouble for you to catch on with them."

"But I am going to quit the woods for good. I am going back to town." The elder man resumed his walk with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Seems foolish to me—that is unless you have got something in sight. You are four times the man you were when you came into this neck of the woods. But of course you know your own business best. However, I thought you liked it up here."

Wilson drew the back of his hand across his eyes. There seemed to be a blur in them and he felt giddy. "I have thought matters over for a week and it seems to be the only course. And in that connection, I have got to take back

what I said to you about money. I am broke and must have a hundred dollars, not as wages but as a loan. Can you raise it for me?"

"No loan about it. You shall have the full amount I owe you. I have arranged with Clawson, the hardware man, to advance me what I need until I sell my horses and get straightened out. My personal credit is good for what I need, but when it comes to borrowing money enough to go into business again—well, I can't do it. No one doubts my honesty, but they do doubt my *ability* to come back. I am getting old and my active working years are numbered and I am no longer a good business risk. See the point?"

"Yes, and I assure you again that it is to be but a thirty-day loan. I am not going to tell you very much to-night, but I will write you in full not a great deal later. The truth of the matter is I had some trouble and came away—some trouble down there." He waved his hand comprehensively towards the south and for a dozen paces no more was said. When the elder man spoke again it was with a simple sincerity

that contrasted sharply with his usual half flippancy.

"Now I am sorry to hear that; sorry for yourself; sorry for myself and sorry for Barbara. That girl thinks a lot of you, boy—as any woman naturally would of a man who had done as much for her as you have for my girl. Of course I don't mean to say she is in love with you or anything like that, but she likes you all-fired well anyway. And if she knew you were in trouble it would worry her quite a bit, I guess. Going to tell her that you are going away for keeps?"

"I have told her, and am going to write her."

"What did she say to it?"

"Nothing."

The silence fell again, broken only by the tread of their feet on the board walk. Findlay's fingers closed upon the younger man's arm and most of his old cheerfulness was in his next sentences. "Anyway, it can't be very serious trouble or you would not be going back to it, so that's one consolation." The hand grip grew more confidential. "You haven't quarreled with the girl have you—had a little spat?"

"No."

The lumberman's face grew puzzled. "Now do you know you two have got me holed up and a smudge started at the opening. I thought I knew Barbara, and I had imagined for some time past that she was pretty much interested in you. You see she is just like her mother—couldn't deceive you if she wanted to, and when you have once learned her alphabet you can read her like a book. I didn't protest, because I knew if I was right in my thoughts it wouldn't do any good to say anything. Surprising to see how obstinate she can be when she gets set on anything—just like her mother again and so different from me. And I ain't saying that I would have protested anyway. It never occurred to me that you or any other man wouldn't jump out of his skin to get a smile from her, so I thought you two would just naturally gravitate. So I kept my eye on you to see if I should fire you or promote you, and when I found out that you had decency as well as brains and pluck I decided on the promotion. When you knocked that whisky glass out of my hand I was tickled. But now it seems that I was

fooled all around and the joke is on me. Glad of it, too. Want to keep her for a few more years to myself. It was because I thought you liked each other's company that I made you her guardian pro tem. Thought I might as well recognize the situation officially, you see. Gosh, but you certainly did appear to be interested in each other that night you took supper with us."

"And I am more interested in her than in any other person in the world. She is the bravest, sweetest, honestest woman I have ever known." Findlay puffed his dying pipe into life, sending the smoke jets shooting from his mouth with the short explosions of a hoisting engine. "Anyway I am glad you parted good friends. Is it really some trouble down there that is taking you away, Mr—" He stopped short again and looked into the other's face. "By the way, what is your other name, Wilson? Been going to ask you a dozen times but never happened to think of it when you were around. Jim or Dick or Bill or something like that?"

"No. Stoddard."

"Stoddard Wilson." Findlay became mus-

ing. "Kind of sounds as if you had the old mare hitched tail first to the manger. Wilson Stoddard would be more euphonious. But it don't matter, Stoddard. Going to tell me your trouble?"

"Not to-night. But I will when I write you and return the loan."

"Drat the loan. Now let's swedge down to the line." The speaker grew serious again and the hand grip tightened. "I ain't in the habit of mincing words and I'm not going to now. From what I gather out of your talk you did something outside of Hoyle back there in town and are going back to face the band. Correct?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now these are my private ideas on that subject spoken right out loud. You say you are going to write my girl and I am interested to that extent at least. There are some steps that a young man can take when he is dancing his first fling in life when his blood tingles through him like hard cider, and be a man for a' that—then again there are others that he can't take. For instance, if young George had hacked down old George's pet

cherry sapling out of pure cussedness he'd never have been president, because he'd have had a natural mean streak in him that the people wouldn't have overlooked. But being that he did it merely out of a desire to try that new hatchet, why, that was nothing but natural—just plain boy. And I reckon the old sinners that used to sit around on the dry goods boxes and pound their heels never did get over poking fun at old George about it. Same way with a young man. Can't expect him to shut his eyes every time a pretty woman commences to dare him, but he can be fairly decent and above board about it and not kick the ten commandments clear out of the frame. But if he goes prowling around under a cloak, deceiving good women and making them love him, lying to them, promising them everything one day and cutting them cold and breaking their hearts the next—that kind of a critter is pure skunk and he had better keep away from me and mine. That's one kind of a man that I'd go trailing if he fooled around my girl. Catch the point?"

"Yes," gulped Wilson, turning his face away.

"And another breed of man that has no busi-

ness breathing the air of the same county with decent women is a man who has got a criminal past and who has run away from it—left a wife or done some other dirt, and who will go to some other place and win a woman's love, marry her and half raise a family, and then when he is caught and jerked to the calaboose leave her and those youngsters to the eternal shame of it. But of course I'm only speaking generally and wasn't thinking of anybody in particular. I don't know what your trouble is and I ain't going to try and nose it up. And I'll say right now that I would bet ten years of my life you wouldn't do either of the things I mentioned, for if there are two things in the world that John Findlay thinks he is wise about they are horses and men. I've handled too many of both kinds of those animals not to know a good deal about them. Let's go back and get that money."

Sick at heart and brooding over the other's words Stoddard strode silently along while Findlay, unspeaking also now that his say was done, left a long trail of tobacco smoke streaming behind him. At the hardware store the lumberman thrust the bills into his companion's

hand with a hearty shake, his other palm resting upon the broad shoulder before him.

"Don't ever think of returning it and send me your address when you write so that I can forward the rest that is coming to you. Your train goes out at six A. M., and inasmuch as I can do nothing more I may not go over to the depot. Good-by, boy. Good luck. And if you ever get up against a brace game just call on John Findlay. I may not have much of a stake, but after what you have done for my girl if it's fifty cents or fifty thousand we'll split it even."

Stoddard's fingers closed tightly around those of the other. "Mr. Findlay, I simply wish to say that as I respect and like Miss Barbara above all other women the same as I respect and like you above all other men. You will hear from me within thirty days and there is one last favor I want you to promise me. Will you do it?"

"Reckon I will. Name it."

"That you won't sell those horses until you hear from me."

Findlay puffed out his cheeks. "But I've got

to have money, you know. Where else am I going to get it?"

"Borrow enough to tide you over for a month and hang on to everything you have that is of value unless you can sell it for more than it is worth. You gave me credit for having some sense, and now I tell you I am talking it. Will you take my word for it?"

"Well, now you have got me treed again, but I'll be cross-sawed if I don't, Stoddard." With a last silent pressure of their hands they went their separate ways.

Wilson, leaving the next morning at six o'clock, from the back platform of the car kept his eyes eagerly alert for the little boarding house that stood within a few rods of the track. And as the train rolled past it he saw at one of the windows a woman with a pale face and a glorious crown of dark hair who stood motionless before the pane watching the accommodation as it pulled out of the village. For a moment the impulse was almost irresistible for him to hold out his arms towards her in a last token of his longing, but conquering it he but raised his cap perfunctorily. She gave him no farewell signal,

no sign that she was aware that he was passing from her life forever; but with his last straining look from far down the track he saw her turn from the window and cover her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XIX

Two days later Wilson, clean shaven and dressed in a plain business suit, opened the door of the general offices of Edward Hamilton, counselor-at-law, and passing the youth on guard in the reception room stepped unannounced into the attorney's private office. The latter looked up with a frown of annoyance at the intrusion, then stared open-mouthed.

"Wilson Stoddard—or his sunburnt ghost—sure as Blackstone was a lawyer!" he gasped as he slowly arose from his chair with his gaze wandering over the other's form. Then with two quick steps he was before the caller and wringing his hand. "What—when—why the devil don't you talk? Sit down there and say something to break the spell."

"Glad to see you, Ed."

A sickly smile ran across the attorney's face. "Enthusiastic greeting from one fresh out of

the grave—or haven't you been really dead at all?"

"Do I look as though I had?"

The counselor eyed the tobacco leaf color of the other's cheeks and grinned a little. "Not unless you spent your ghost period in some place where they tan people up considerably. But let's get down to business. Where have you been all these months?"

"In the great out doors where the snow was not muck, but as light and white as whipped cream. Also, where there was air that had never been breathed before and rivers that swing through forests of real trees as tall as this ten story building. Now do you know?"

"No, but by George you look it. You are only about three shades lighter than a wooden Indian and you look just as solid." He reached forth a tentative hand and felt the swelling muscles of the other's arm, turned over a browned hand and looked at the callouses of the palm and chuckled with delight. No athlete had ever had a harder "rooter" in his behalf than had Wilson possessed in this lawyer man in their college days; and none had regretted Stoddard's

downfall more than had this same Hamilton. And now to see his physical idol come to his own again was a greater joy to the man of books than had the other handed him a wallet full of bills. His delight was boundless.

"Say, but you are great. Clear eyed, hard as nails and ten pounds heavier than you ever were before at that. You've cut out the fizz I take it—and a mighty good job too, by the way. You don't know how you had us all worried for a while." Hamilton whirled around to his desk and scratched away hastily with his pen as he rattled on. "Just you wait until I get these deeds filled out. Going to take you over to the Athletic Club then and show you to the boys. They'll be tickled to death to see you so fit. Back in a minute." He jumped from his chair and hurried into the outer office with the deeds, leaving his caller staring after him with growing bewilderment.

The meaning of it all was as far beyond Stoddard's comprehension as the stars. Where he had expected side glances of aversion, or at best but a clammy shaking of the hand, Hamilton could not have appeared more delighted to have

welcomed home his long lost brother. And he had been a warm friend of the slain man as well as of himself. Dully Stoddard ran the other's words through his mind. "Take you over to the Athletic Club and show you to the boys. They will be tickled to death to see you so fit!" What meant it all that they, the friends and chums of the man he had killed would be tickled to see his murderer strong and well? Was Hamilton's joyous greeting but a subterfuge to disarm him? And was his hurried exit but a trick to detain him while he summoned the police? He dismissed the thought with a blush of self shame. Edward Hamilton was not that sort of a man. As soon would he be guilty of such trickery himself. But the lawyer's conduct was totally beyond his powers of analysis.

Hamilton returning pulled his chair close before the other and laid his hand upon his knee. "Wish you would tell me all about it, old man. We had all given you up for dead. When the months rolled by with no trace of you, we all thought you had been so cut up over poor Grayford's death that you—well, that you had done

something foolish to yourself, to tell the plain truth. You were not in very good shape then, you know. The boys have not got through speculating and mourning over you yet. You can imagine what a jolt you gave me when you came walking through that door looking as big as a house. Say, but I'm glad. Let's go over to the club."

Stoddard leaned back in his chair and looked straight into the other's face. "Hamilton," he began hoarsely. "You don't know how much I appreciate your charity and brotherly greeting; but I would no more step my foot across the doors of the club than I would cut it off. The boys—some of them—might be glad to see me and welcome me as you have done, although I cannot believe it. But be that as it may, I would never enter the doors of my friends again even though I knew I was welcome and free to do so. I came here on business, serious business and I want you to attend to it for me. After that is done we will talk for a while of other things if you desire, but not before. Please take your pen."

It was now the lawyer's turn to be astonished and he was, openly so, and without effort at concealment. The hopeless ring of the other's sentences and the careworn lines that had suddenly drawn themselves about his mouth chilled his enthusiasm and worried him not a little. "Sick?" he asked anxiously.

"About as sick as a man can be—here," touching his temples, "but physically I am as well as I look. Now to business. You have a list of my notes and securities and I wish you would get it."

Almost automatically Hamilton opened the door of his private vault and drew forth a tin box labeled "Stoddard" from which he took certain papers. "You want them all?" he inquired. Wilson nodded his assent.

"Then here is the list. Loan on Beckwith real estate, note secured by first mortgage, fifty thousand; four and a half per cent. Ditto Lyman-Peck estate, forty thousand, five per cent. D. & E. W. bonds, ten years to run, four per cent., one hundred thousand. Leased ground in Parker subdivision drawing five per cent. on a

forty thousand valuation. That is all the memoranda I have. Of course I don't know anything about your private bank account."

"Which is ten or eleven thousand, and a few personal I. O. U's which amount to a couple of thousand more. That brings the total up to about two hundred and forty-three thousand dollars with debts nil. How much can I realize on those notes and bonds at forced sale—cash to-day?"

Hamilton meditated. "Par—or a trifle better on some of them if you have got to have the money at once. But you would have hard work to place your money again to better advantage. Better think twice about it, old man."

"I have thought about it not twice but a hundred times and it has got to be done. Now I will tell you what I want you to do and you must remember that you are acting as my lawyer for a fee in this matter and there is no friendship in it. I'll get you those D. & E. W. bonds for a hundred thousand out of my safety deposit vault and you take them to your broker, sell them and get a sight draft for the amount, payable to the order of one John Findlay.

Then I want to turn those notes for ninety thousand dollars over to one Barbara Findlay in her own name and right to be held in trust for her, she to receive the interest on it as long as she lives, but never the principal. I will endorse them over to her and you attend to the other end of it. The remaining money and property I wish to remain as it is—my own. I will get you the bonds, and after you have negotiated them I want you to come back here and draw my will. I will wait here while you are gone.”

Hamilton sank into a heap in his chair. “Wilson, you have gone crazy,” he gasped.

“No. Remember that you are merely earning a professional fee for carrying out my wishes now.”

“But you are only leaving yourself a fifth of your fortune—a mere fifty thousand.”

“Never mind. It will be enough.”

Like one in a daze the lawyer gathered up the slips of paper and thrust them back in the box. Then abruptly he turned and stood before his caller, clear spoken and vigorous; the forceful counselor fighting *with* his client *for* his client.

"Wilson, I am now speaking to you as your paid attorney and with no friendship in it. You come to me and ask me to do certain things which seem to me to be prejudicial to your interests and without enlightening me as to why you do them. As your attorney, hired to protect your interests, I refuse to sacrifice you until I become satisfied that it is the proper course for me to pursue. And the only way you can satisfy me is to tell me the facts. No man can retain my services until I know the facts of the case—at least his version of them. I'll not work in the dark for any man nor for any fee. Now out with it or go elsewhere for a lawyer. Why are you doing this?"

"Because I wish to."

"Why the will? Are you going to commit suicide?"

"Physically, no. Socially, yes."

"What do you mean by that? Out with it now and tell me what it all means." Stoddard leaped from his chair and paced the floor with set jaws and hands clenched; then burst forth bitterly.

"Mean! I'll tell you what it means fast

enough. It means that I met a man in the wilderness who was a father to me; who lost all he possessed through a great calamity and whom I am going to put upon his feet again with a part of my useless fortune. It means that I met a woman there also, an honest, true-hearted woman whom I love better than I do my own life—a woman whom I unintentionally wronged and whom I am going to keep from toil and physical want as long as she lives with more of this money of mine than I can never use. And it means that when I have done those things I am going to the police, surrender myself for the killing of Grayford and bear my punishment with what fortitude I possess. Now do you understand, friend Hamilton?"

The lawyer sat down weakly. "I knew you were crazy all the while," he murmured as the other man gloomed down upon him. "Do you really think you killed Grayford?" With the leap of a cat Stoddard was close over him.

"None of that, Hamilton. I did not come here to be mocked or jested with. If it was not for what I have suffered in the past, and must suffer in the future because of a blow which I

once struck, I would be tempted to lay hands upon you now. But I shall never strike another man except in the defense of myself or mine own, for no one but the Almighty and myself know the penalty I have paid for my quick temper. And my punishment is only beginning." Feebly the lawyer sought to push the speaker away.

"But you did not kill him," he protested. Stoddard's face grew still darker.

"Explain that, Hamilton. I am sick and tired of your attitude towards me. Come out like a man and tell me what you are driving at. Not five minutes ago you said that I did kill him."

"I said nothing of the kind. I said, 'since Grayford's death we feared for you.'" Hamilton sat bolt upright once more, dim understanding beginning to percolate his brain; and true to his legal instinct started to cross question the strange man before him. Half a dozen incisive questions and quick answers cleared away the mystery.

"You have been in the wilderness. What newspapers have you read since you entered it?"

"None at all. I did not wish to know the details."

"When was the last time you read the papers?"

"The day I left."

"When was that?"

"The very day of the killing."

"Has anyone who knew the facts communicated with you since then?"

"No."

A long breath of understanding came from the questioner's lips and he relaxed a little, a grave half-smile upon his face. Stoddard, erect and tense, heard the sigh uncomprehendingly. The lawyer's voice became lulled to the plain matter of fact.

"Now sit quietly and keep cool. Solitude has its advantages, and in certain ways it has worked wonders with you. But on the other hand it has kept you grossly ignorant; caused you much useless suffering and hounded you to the brink of despair. Had you read the papers one day longer, you would have known that you no more killed Grayford than I did. His death was entirely due to natural causes."

"What!" whispered the other. He could say

no more, but with staring eyes sat wetting his dry lips with his dry tongue. Calmly Hamilton went on.

“Your blow made a scalp wound which bled quite freely, and Grayford fell as it landed and died immediately. Those who were gathered around and who saw it all, being laymen and not medical men, most naturally attributed his death to the blow, as you did yourself and as I would have done had I been present. When you fled someone called for the police who came post haste, and they, being laymen as well, called it murder; sent Grayford to a morgue and turned the detective force loose after you. Of course a lot of newspaper police reporters were hanging on to the patrol wagon when it came, and within an hour extras containing an account of the affair were scattered throughout the city describing the occurrence and accusing you. One of those happened to be the last paper you read. But the surgeons who performed the autopsy soon got at the facts of the case. A coroner’s jury was empaneled immediately and it was ascertained beyond all possible doubt that Grayford had died of apoplexy, superinduced by his mode

of living and the rage that he had fallen into because of his hatred of you. Your blow caused but a slight scalp wound and would not even have staggered him had it not been his time to die. The coroner's jury completely exonerated you, and that very night the detectives were called in and search for you was abandoned. You were then in hiding."

The lips of the listener moved but no sound came from them and Hamilton slowly finished.

"The next morning the papers were filled with the case, telling how Grayford had persecuted and maligned you, even rising as if to strike you, and how you maddened by his long-continued attacks and slanders had thrown the match receiver at him, and seeing him fall and die had fled. It was a complete vindication of you other than of an assault under conditions that would arouse any man's fighting blood. Regret was Grayford's portion, sympathy yours. Then, of course, we expected you to come forth, but as the months went by and you did not do so we became alarmed. At first we attributed your seclusion to a humiliation that would eventually wear away and permit you to come back to us; later on we

took a graver view. We made inquiries everywhere we could imagine that you might be, but you apparently had blotted yourself from existence and we were forced to give you up—here there! What's the matter of you?"

Wilson's head had sunk gradually forward upon his breast and he now sat in his chair in a motionless, tenseless heap. Hamilton leaping up raised his head and looked into the half-closed eyes. For the only time in his life Wilson Stoddard had fainted.

A dash of water in the face and the lids unclosed and Stoddard sat up blinking a trifle dizzily at his friend. "Say that all over again, Ed," he whispered. The lawyer smiled.

"It would take too long, but I will give it to you in pill form for your mental stomach to digest. You did not hurt Grayford beyond a scratch. His death was due to the anger he worked himself into because of his dislike of you. You were exonerated by the law and by the public which said that Grayford got—so far as you were concerned—no more than he deserved, though of course everybody regretted his death. Got that digested?"

Stoddard nodded.

"Then how about the giving away of your fortune? Does that still apply?"

"No. The complexion of the world has changed while I slept. You need not trouble yourself about those bonds and mortgages. You have earned your fee in a different way."

"Feel all right now?"

"Better than ever before in my life."

"Then come over to the club."

Stoddard shook his head decisively. "No, old man. What I said about the portals of my friends in this town I shall stick to. While fate has been more than kind to me, I still feel that I would not care to again meet the old crowd. Give them my love, Ed. They will understand."

Hamilton meditated as he lighted a cigar. "Don't know but you are right," he returned presently. "They would be awfully glad to see you and would welcome you with open arms, but I can imagine how you feel about it. Lunch with me privately then."

But Stoddard was on his feet with his hand extended. "Not to-day, my boy. I'm going to leave within an hour—quick as I can get that

eleven thousand out of the bank. The fact is I have grown to love that bright-sky land better than I ever liked the soot and smoke of this big town. It has made a man of me physically and taught me that steady, intelligent labor is the panacea for most of the ills that we are heir to. I like the country and I like the business and I am going into it with a partner who knows it as you know pleadings and practice. I've got the money, he's got the experience and between us we'll get out of it all there is in it. Of course I am not saying that I won't take occasional flyers to the big town, and one of these days I'll give you a blowout—but no wine."

"And you are off at once?"

"At once. You will hear from me within a week or so. Good luck, old boy, and sorry to leave you but something very pressing hurries me away."

"And her name is Barbara," smiled the lawyer man astutely.

Stoddard returned the smile from the threshold of the door. "And her name is Barbara, Ed."

CHAPTER XX

BACK in Phoenix late in the evening of the second day thereafter, Stoddard sought the little boarding house immediately upon his dismounting from the train. At the door he was informed that Miss Barbara was not well—had not been for several days—and had retired an hour before. Mr. Findlay was somewhere about the town. So Wilson tramped off in search of him.

The sawdust streets were dimly lighted by kerosene lamps perched upon short poles and the few business houses were closed and dark, but from the open doors of a dozen saloons yellow light and more or less discordant sounds were bursting. To the short end of the sprawling business district he wandered, then back again without having encountered the sinewy form of the man for whom he searched. He halted in front of a saloon from which came the twang of a banjo and the thump of boots as a deep-voiced

Scandinavian dancer shuffled and droned to the roared chorus of "Jill-poke."

"Aye tank Aye ride on a yill-poke log,
Yill-poke, yill-poke.
Aye yump for hay neck with a yump like a frog,
Yill-poke, yill-poke.
Aye ride heem hellupsy, larrupsy down,
Aye fall in the water an' Aye mostsome drown.
Aye shouldsome, mostsome, liefsome die,
Pike-reel laf' till he nearsome cry,
YILL-POKE, YILL-POKE."

As the thunder of heels and voices ceased the listener turned towards the door and stepped within. He well knew that Findlay seldom frequented saloons except when business or policy led him there, but having searched the streets for him in vain and knowing not where else to look at this late hour, he entered the place with the faint hope that the logger might have stepped within to pass a few moments among the men, many of whom had worked with and under him in snow and flood for a score of years gone by. The bar was a roughly-knocked-together pine

affair backed by a mottled mirror and a few dozen tumblers and glasses, the floor thinly sprinkled with sawdust, while in their chairs a dozen woodsmen were drinking and roaring through the fog of tobacco smoke that hung from ceiling to floor in an eddying mist. Much to the incomer's surprise the dancer and imitator was the giant Cardiff.

With a last pawing step that sent a spout of sawdust over the nearest onlookers the walking boss of the Badger Company quieted his feet and turned towards the one who had just entered. His face was aflame, his sullen, passion-marked mouth drooping and brutal from whisky. With no sign that he recognized Stoddard he waved the sitters forward with a sweep of his arm and commanded that all present drink with him, seizing the bar in his great fingers and shaking it until it rattled like a dice box as he cursed their slowness in accepting his invitation. To cross Cardiff in his sober moments was bad enough, but to anger him while on a drunk was like crossing a lion in his amours. And the men, ready as they were to drink at anybody's expense save their own, feared their towering host and

shrunk as far as possible beyond the radius of his arms. Findlay was not among them, and hesitating but long enough to make sure of this fact Stoddard started for the door. With a bound Cardiff was upon him, one hand hooked deep in his collar.

"I said everybody take a drink with me. Do you hear?" he roared as he dragged his captive partially resisting to the center of the bar. Deeply resenting this rough handling from one whom he knew hated him and but sought a quarrel, Wilson nevertheless made passionless answer.

"I am not drinking to-night, Mr. Cardiff. Thank you, and please let go of me."

The red shot eyes of the great man narrowed wickedly and the clutch tightened. "Think you are too good to drink with a common walking boss?" he demanded as he swung the other around so that his whisky-sodden breath was foul to Stoddard's nose. That latter's head shook a negative.

"Then prove it. What will you have?"

"I will drink a bottle of pop."

"*Pap*, you mean," sneared Cardiff, bringing

the huge fist of his free arm thunderously upon the board. "You, pretending to be a man and a lumber jack and drinking *pap*!" An uproarious howling laugh arose from the hearers, but Stoddard swallowing the hot retort that burned on the tip of his tongue remained impassive.

"It will be pop or nothing. Please let me loose." The flush of Cardiff's cheeks grew deeper.

"By God it will be whisky and plenty of it. Drink that," he snarled as he thrust his own brimming glass of cheap liquor before the other's face. And at the sight and smell of his great enemy of the past now once more at his very lips, the indignation that had glowed within him at the bullyings of the man that held him burst into a great blaze of anger. With the quickness of the strike of a serpent he raised his hand and brought it down edgewise with all his force upon Cardiff's elbow, and as the smitten muscles doubled up beneath the blow he wrenched himself free and leaped backward to the middle of the floor. Bellowing with rage and the pain of the blow Cardiff came at him.

"By the Eternal, I'll twist your neck for that,"

he swore. But the saloon man was between them in an instant, a blazing kerosene lamp in his hand.

"If you want to fight, get out in front and go to it, but you can't start anything in here. The first one that let's go another lick in this place will get this lamp busted over his head, fire, glass, oil and all—if the whole shebang goes to glory because of it," he yelled. And as the walking boss paused knowing full well that Red Hicks would carry out his threat, the pack behind him burst into full cry demanding that the pair go without and settle it man to man in fair battle. For though your woodsman will hit below the belt, bite, gouge and kick with spike-armed shoes, yet he does not complain if his brother at arms does likewise unto him, and man to man is his motto. In a swirling mass they crowded through the door, Cardiff with bull-like bellows as he hurled coat and hat far to one side. And as they reached the sawdust-carpeted street Stoddard, knowing well the folly of it, made his last peace offering as the voices lulled.

"I have no quarrel with you, Cardiff. All I wish is to be left in peace."

"And all I wish is to leave you in pieces," was the savage response. Forearmed with a knowledge of the bitterness of the struggle to come, Wilson cast his coat aside and stood balanced easily as his enemy stripped off his tightly fitting sweater.

From the nearby saloons attracted by the uproar men came swarming until a solid, eager-eyed throng had formed itself into an irregular circle about the enemies. From either side of the street sputtering oil lamps cast a mottled film of light upon the sawdust arena. Fairly in its center stood Stoddard, strong of feature, powerful and active; the typical heavyweight athlete; in one corner his huge enemy who cursed him as he tore at the clinging sweater. On all sides uncouth figures whispered to each other as they shifted from side to side that they might gain a position of better vantage. And now impatient for the battle to begin, knowing that he must fight, Wilson vowed that should the opportunity come to him to strike home he would not forget that this was the man who in his devilish jealousy and rage had left Barbara Findlay unwarned in the path of the fire. The bare thought

of the murderous brutality of that act hardened and tempered him as cold water hardens and tempers red hot iron.

From his corner of the ring Cardiff stripped to his trousers and undershirt came stalking, Herculean of chest and shoulders, his head held high and his fists close before him after the rough and ready fashion of the untaught natural fighter who knows not whether his first move will be to strike or grapple. Stoddard, as the best all around athlete of his great university had received years of tuition from the ablest ex-masters of the prize ring, and his boxing skill was little short of the professional standard. And now to mislead his enemy by covering his science beneath a cloak of awkwardness became his plan, and he shuffled cautiously about with arms hanging limp as ropes. Full within reach of Cardiff's arms he put himself, and the giant swung his right fist first in a terrific semi-circle, the force of the blow well-nigh whirling him from his feet. To his amazement he hit but thin air; yet his foe still standing before him in the loose attitude of a disjointed man had not moved from

his tracks. The lightning-like duck of Wilson's head had left him untouched.

With a mutter of fresh rage Cardiff advanced again. He came more cautiously now, feeling his way with his feet as he sought to come within striking distance, but the other slowly retreating maintained his distance almost to a hair. Again finding himself within range Cardiff loosed his fist, and again Stoddard's head seemed to vanish as the blow cleaved the space it had occupied but the fraction of a second before. A low, long drawn "Ah-h," came from the circle, and Wilson became conscious of a commotion at the edge of the crowd as somebody forced his way through to the innermost edge. Then a well-known voice rang clear in the silence.

"Take care of yourself, boy. I'm here, and there will be no dirty work as long as John Findlay can keep on his legs. Look out—he's coming." With a deceptively swift sidestep Wilson was far to one side.

Twice more the big woodsman lunged at his shadowy foe, freeing blows that fairly landed would have dropped any man on earth, each time

missing the loosely hung figure by a few scant inches and wrenching his muscles from the very violence of the unstopped swings. And as the last attempt hit but unresisting air, a sharp yelp of derision arose from somewhere in the crowd, and under that wordless taunt the rage of the attacking one grew into the unreasoning fury of a bull who closes his eyes and charges blindly. Head held low and right fist drawn back for a far-reaching swing that would reach this elusive enemy of his who would not fight but ever retreated crab-like as he advanced, Cardiff rushed. Then the unexpected happened.

Like the snap of a whip the loose-jointed figure grew rigid and instead of a backward leap there was a swift step forward and a hard fist at the end of a stiffened arm met the oncomer in the middle of his rush, the whole weight of a heavy body back of it. And Cardiff, stopped in his tracks as though he had run against a wall, wheeled and dropped in a heap. From the audience there arose a yell of applause, sharp and explosive, followed by a silence that was only broken by the ringing voice of Findlay as he uttered terse sentences of encouragement.

Stepping to the far side of the ring Stoddard stood at rest again as his enemy, dazed and bleeding staggered to his feet. Then he cautiously advanced.

Befuddled of brain by the terrific jar of the blow and the fumes of the whisky, and having learned a great lesson at great cost, the giant's recklessness vanished and wariness took its place. Instead of rushing blindly he began to spar at arm's length, only quickly to learn that at this, the real science of the game, he was absolutely at his opponent's mercy. For Wilson, working with baffling ease about him, with lightning feints and puzzling sidesteps stung him with snapping left hand blows that dazed and blinded him, until rage at his impotence once more overcame him and he again leaped forward. And the other, attempting to spring aside, slipped upon the greasy under side of a strip of bark and went down upon his hands and knees. The next instant Cardiff's boot landing terrifically against his ribs bowled him flat upon his back where he lay gasping for breath and with a sharp pain stabbing him through the body like the thrust of a sword. And at that act of

cowardice towards an enemy who had turned his back upon him when he was down, jeers and hisses fell upon Cardiff's head, and Findlay raging like a lion in the grasp of half a dozen men would have beaten them off despite their numbers and hurled himself upon the giant had not the latter realized that the anger of the crowd was upon him and walked sullenly to the opposite side of the ring. For half a dozen seconds Stoddard lay gasping, and then with the sharpness of the pain gone and a throbbing ache in its place he got upon his feet.

Desperate though he was, he was deadly calm now. He had to be, for the quickness had been kicked out of him and sudden movements caused him almost unendurable pain. He could no longer evade his foe, nor on the other hand could he compete with him in brute strength. Superior skill alone was in his favor. Yet what he was to do he must do quickly and with all his remaining strength, trusting to luck to its being decisive. As Cardiff came forward to meet him Wilson noted the position of his arms, decided upon his course and took it instantly.

Fairly within reach of the other's right arm he placed himself as he courted a blow that should it land would leave him senseless upon the ground; saw the great fist leap forward, and slipping his head to one side threw his left leg back of his foe's heels and his left arm across his throat. It was the deadly "back heel" of the olden time prize ring, and properly executed no man could withstand it. With his leg for the trip and his arm for the backward throw he launched his full strength, and Cardiff's feet flying up and his head flying down he landed with a crash upon his back, the full weight of Stoddard's body coming down upon him. A sharp explosion of breath came from the under man's lips and he did not move as the other regained his feet. For ten seconds—twenty—a full half minute he lay motionless and pale, then slowly struggled to arise. Silently three of his friends raised him and carried him within the saloon, bewildered and shaken to the marrow of his bones, while the remainder of the crowd urged forward by that fierce instinct that makes man and brute pay homage to the victor of bloody

battles surged around the conquerer as they smote him upon the back with wild shoutings. Through the mob Findlay led him, bent forward somewhat at the hips and suffering acutely, to the quiet of the nearest cheap hostelry.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE of Stoddard's ribs was broken, but outside of considerable pain and stiffness to be endured for a few weeks there was nothing to be dreaded. Findlay sat beside him that night while a physician did all that could be done, and after the departure of the medicine man he still remained in his chair by the bedside as he puffed at his pipe. "Hurt you to talk?" he inquired after fifteen minutes of silence. The one in the bed replied that it did not provided he talked slowly and between breaths. So Findlay got down to business.

"I had been over to the house of a friend of mine—Ex-judge Collins—for an evening's visit and was coming home when I saw the crowd and knew there was a fight on. I asked somebody who were swapping licks and was told that it was Cardiff and you. Well, I was surprised. Thought you had gone for good and had imagined you were a thousand miles away. At first

I thought he must be mistaken, then I got a peep of you against the light and knew that his talk was the straight goods. I bucked and kicked my way through, for after the way Cardiff left you and Barbara for the fire to eat up I didn't know but he might do you some dirt and I wanted to be there to rub his nose in it in case he did. Also, I wanted to see him licked to a frazzle, and if he had got the better of you he'd had to whale me in the same ring. You just wait until the news of how he cut out from Archer without telling anyone that he had got wind of the fire gets around and see what happens to him! They'll ride him out of the country on a rail sure as taxes unless he gets wise and beats them out. I told Meyer about it the other day, and what do you suppose the old skinflint did? Took down his shotgun and told Cardiff if he ever showed his nose around the place again he'll fill him full of birdshot. That's the reason Cardiff got on a drunk—because he lost his job. Old Meyer surprised me. I didn't suppose he had a human instinct in him. Say, what brought you back so soon? More bad luck?"

"No. As great good fortune as fate ever showed a man. The trouble I spoke to you about is all over and I am a free man again."

"Free!" Findlay removed his pipe and looked questioningly at the speaker. "Now do you know I never noticed a ball and chain hitched to you. It never occurred to me before that you had been a prisoner."

The patient smiled. "Morally and mentally free I mean. Of course in a physical sense I have had a restricted amount of liberty."

The logger thrust his pipe back into a corner of his mouth and twisted a bit in the chair. "I ain't especially curious as a general rule—Barbara's got my share of that—but I'll be blazed if this minute I don't feel like a human question mark. And it's all because you are so infernally mysterious about it. Time come for you to tell yet?"

Stoddard painfully turned himself over until he faced the speaker and began. Slowly but unsparingly he went over his life from its beginning to the hour of the fight, omitting only the incident of the intended transferring of his fortune, while the listener with his pipe held dead

and smokeless between his lips listened like a man carved from wood. But when the narrator had finished and turned upon his back again the wooden man became flesh and blood once more.

"Boy," said he gravely, "I have listened to your every word and tried to give each act you related its proper significance as you went along. I think I understand you. I have no criticism to make of your life except those things that arose directly from the drink curse. But that vice you have conquered and I know you have manhood enough to remain a teetotaler to the last day of your life. As far as my respect for and confidence in you are concerned, neither has altered one whit since I saw you last. And here is my hand on that. But now that your mind is free again and your future at your disposal, I want to know what brought you back so soon to these woods. Now you answer that."

"One reason is this. As I told you once before I have grown to like them and have an idea I would like to be a successful lumberman. The business offers as good opportunities and as many rewards as any other, and it is the only occupation that I have even partly mastered.

Now if I could only find a partner whom I could trust, a wise old head to advise and teach me, I would buy up that big tract of pine over on the Moose and start in on a liberal scale next fall. Have you got such a party in mind?"

"There's Kelly," suggested the other thoughtfully. "First rate business man, square, all kinds of experience—made a fortune out of the business and got busted playing the board of trade. But he has quit speculating and is attending strictly to his knitting—making money too, but a little cramped for capital. He might let you in."

"How about yourself, Mr. Findlay," interjected Wilson with a quiet smile.

"Hey!"

"How about yourself? I think we could pull together."

The gray head of the elder man sank slowly into his palms and by the night lamp the patient saw two big tears roll from under them down the tanned cheeks. The next instant, however, Findlay had whisked them impatiently aside.

"We won't speak about that to-night, boy—there will be plenty of time when you are con-

valescing to talk matters over. Take my word for it when I say I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your confidence and offer. And I'll not deny that at first thought it tempts me sorely, for I've been in the harness so long as a jobber and owner that it is a bitter pill to think of going back to work by the day as I did thirty years ago. But beyond all other reasons, I want to get into business and make money again for my daughter's sake."

"Which leads up to the strongest reason I had for returning in such haste. I love Barbara and I want to ask her to marry me. With your consent I am going to do so."

For the second time that night the gray head was bowed, and through a hundred tickings of the clock both men were lost in thought. Findlay arose. "I guess I'll let you and her fight that out between yourselves. 'Fraid to get mixed up in it. Sleepy?"

"Not in the least."

"Then take this. The medicine man said you ought to have sleep and told me to give it to you when I left. I'll tell Barbara in the morning

that you are here. Send word if you need me during the night." He closed the door quietly and was gone, his footfalls echoing faintly down the bare hall.

The early forenoon sunlight peeping into the injured man's room saw him bolstered up in bed with a litter of empty breakfast dishes on the table beside him. The physician had gone a few moments before with a smile upon his face at the havoc that the invalid had wrought upon the morning meal. A light knock sounded on the pine panel and Wilson bade the visitor enter.

The door opened and Barbara stood before him pale but clear of complexion, the ineffable tenderness of her woman's heart mirrored in her softly sympathetic eyes, and in the sweetness of the smile about her lips. Slowly she advanced, sinking upon the chair by the bedside at his motion.

He took her hand and for a long minute they looked into each others' faces with no word spoken. "Barbara," he whispered at last.

"Yes," she answered very low.

"I have come back to tell you."

"And I have come to listen. But my ears hear little."

"Has your father told you why I went away as I did?"

"He told me some things. They were sufficient. I do not ask for more."

"But did he tell you why I had returned?"

"Yes. To go into business."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Then listen and hear the rest. Come closer, please—loud talking hurts my side." He drew her towards him until her ear was at his lips which whispered into it. And as the whisperings grew and grew, slowly her form relaxed until her face was buried upon his shoulder, one white forearm stealing softly around his neck.

And it was thus that John Findlay entering five minutes later, found them.

THE END

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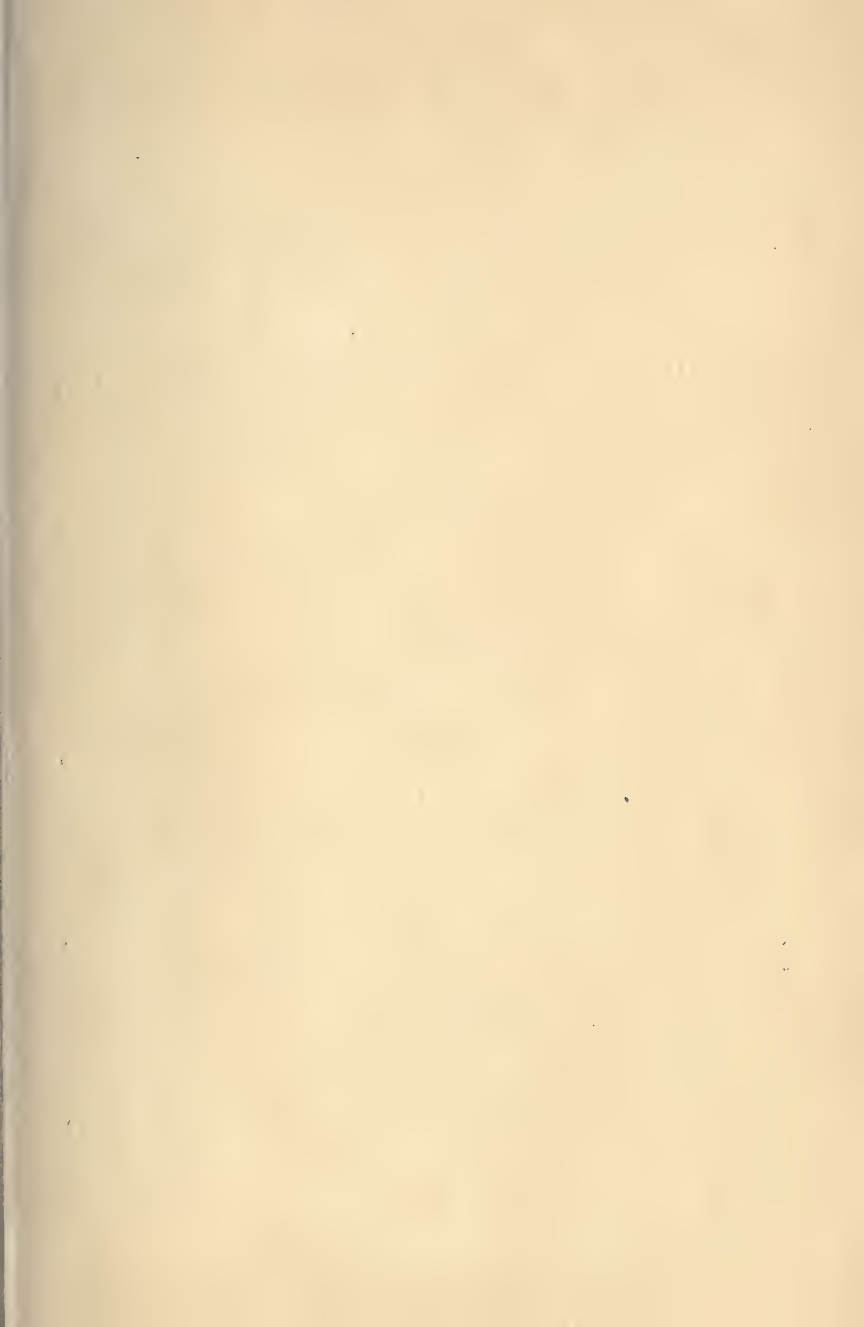
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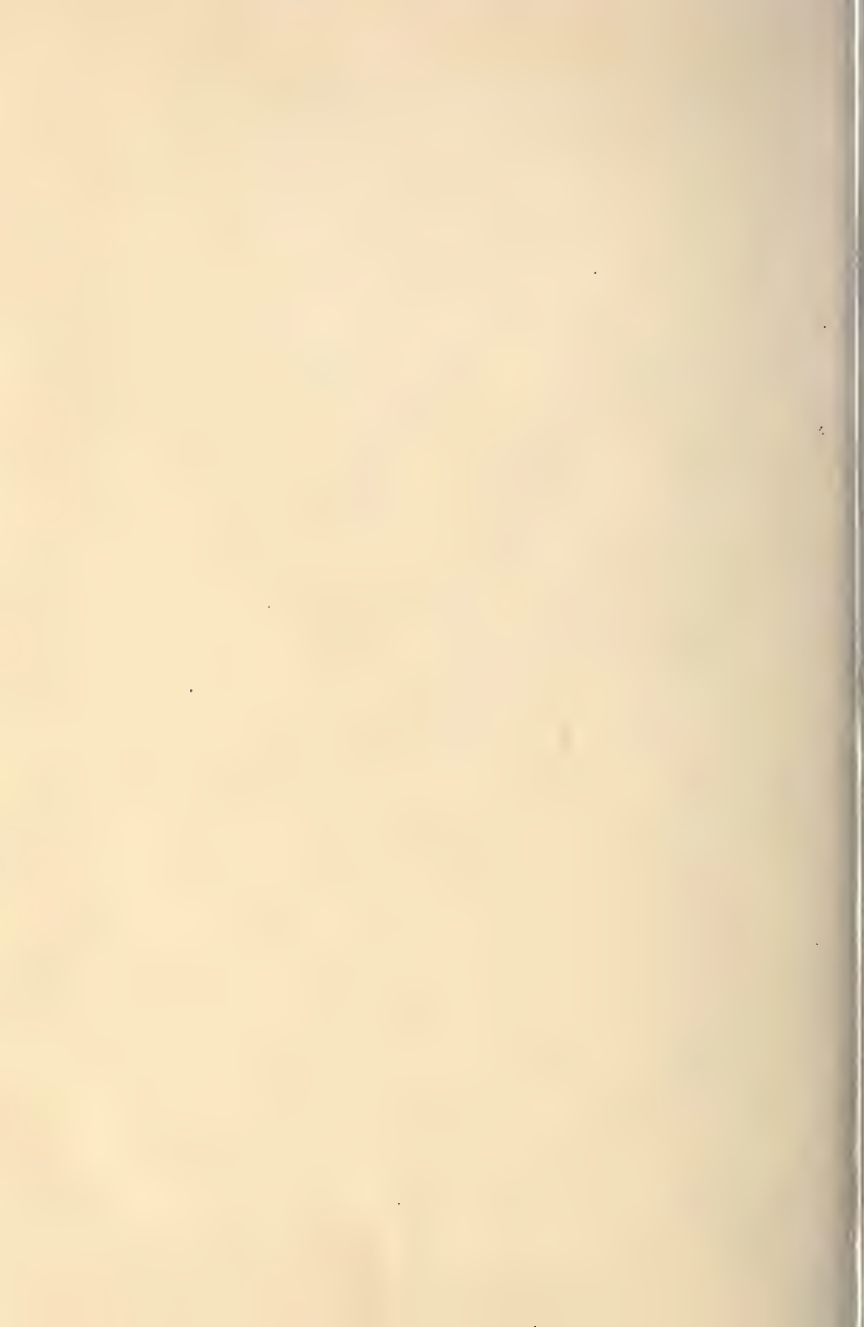
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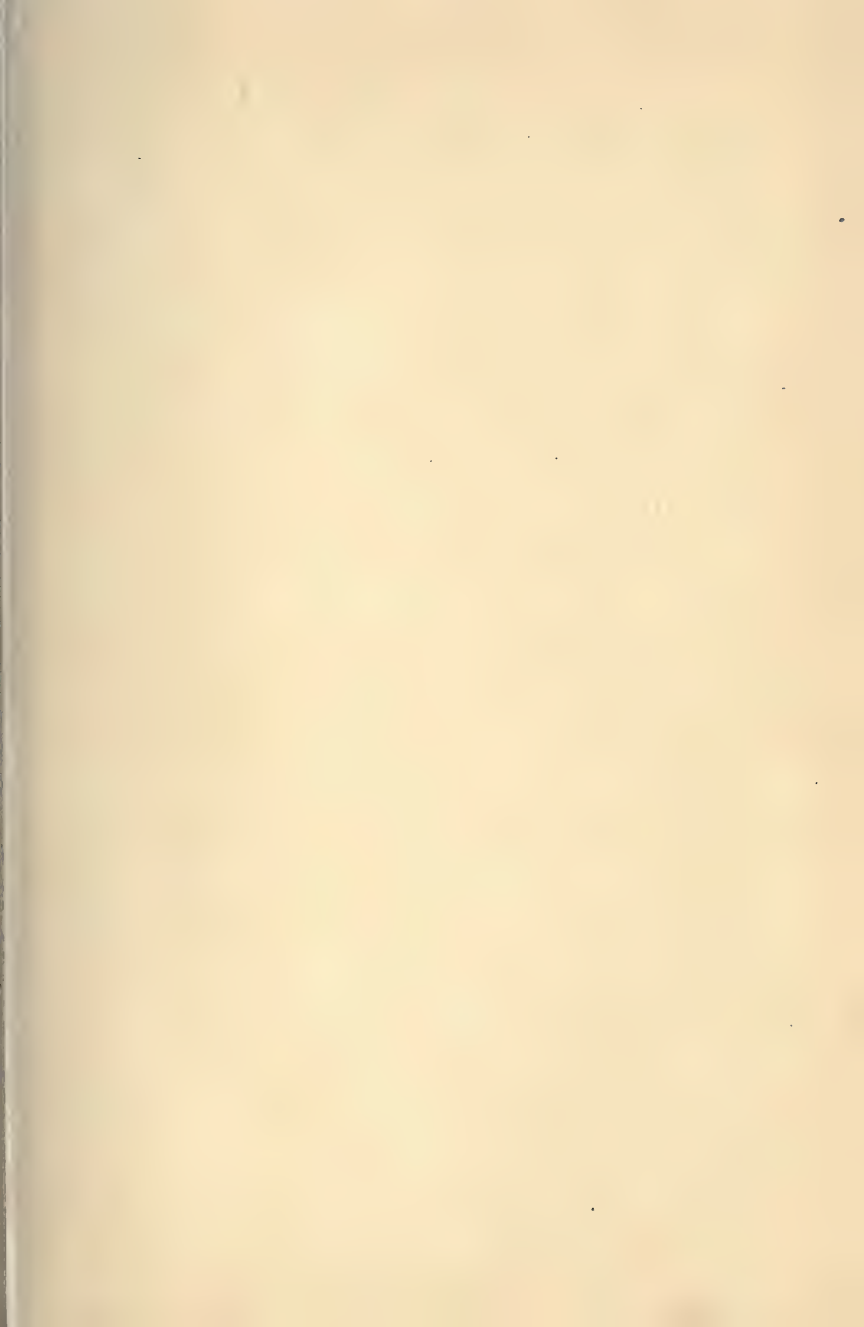
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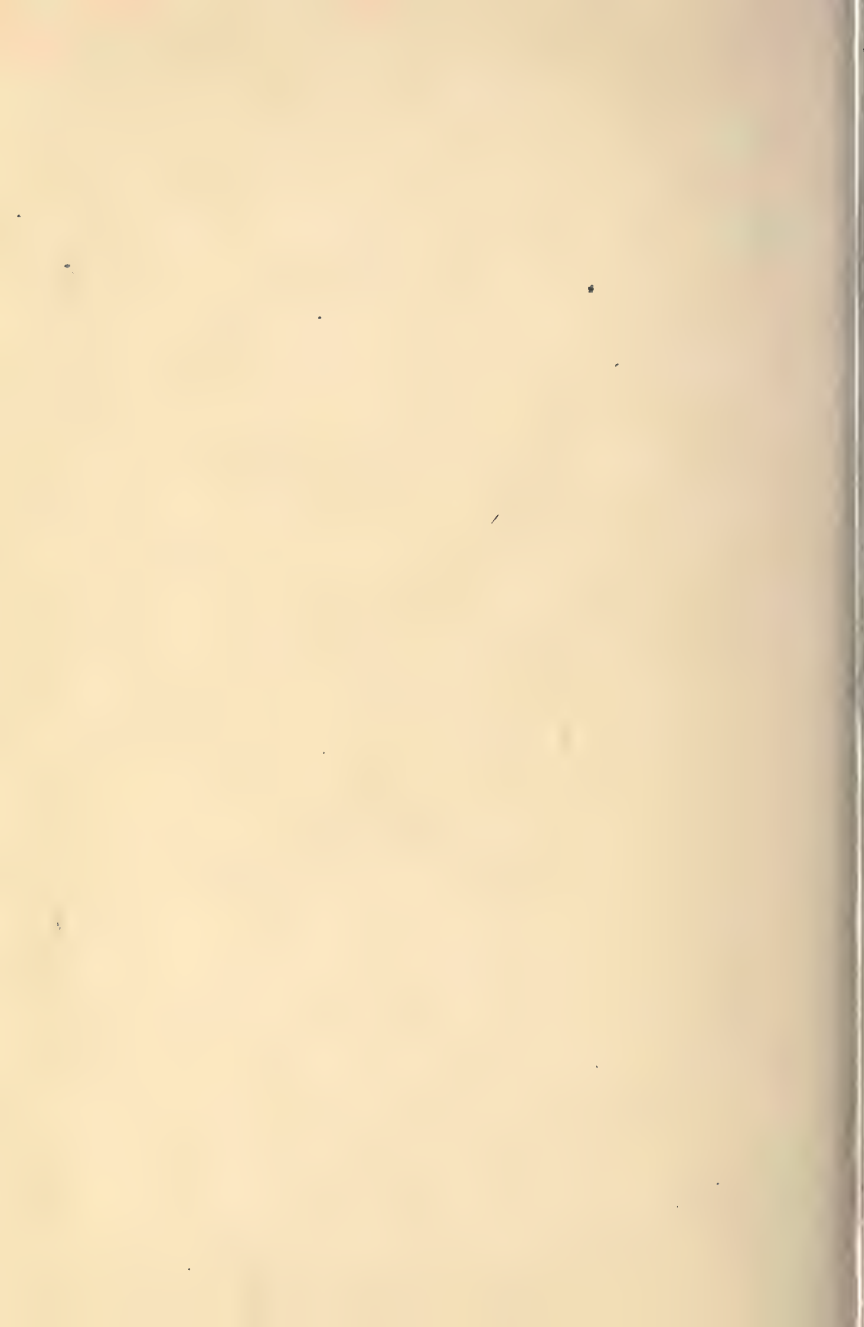
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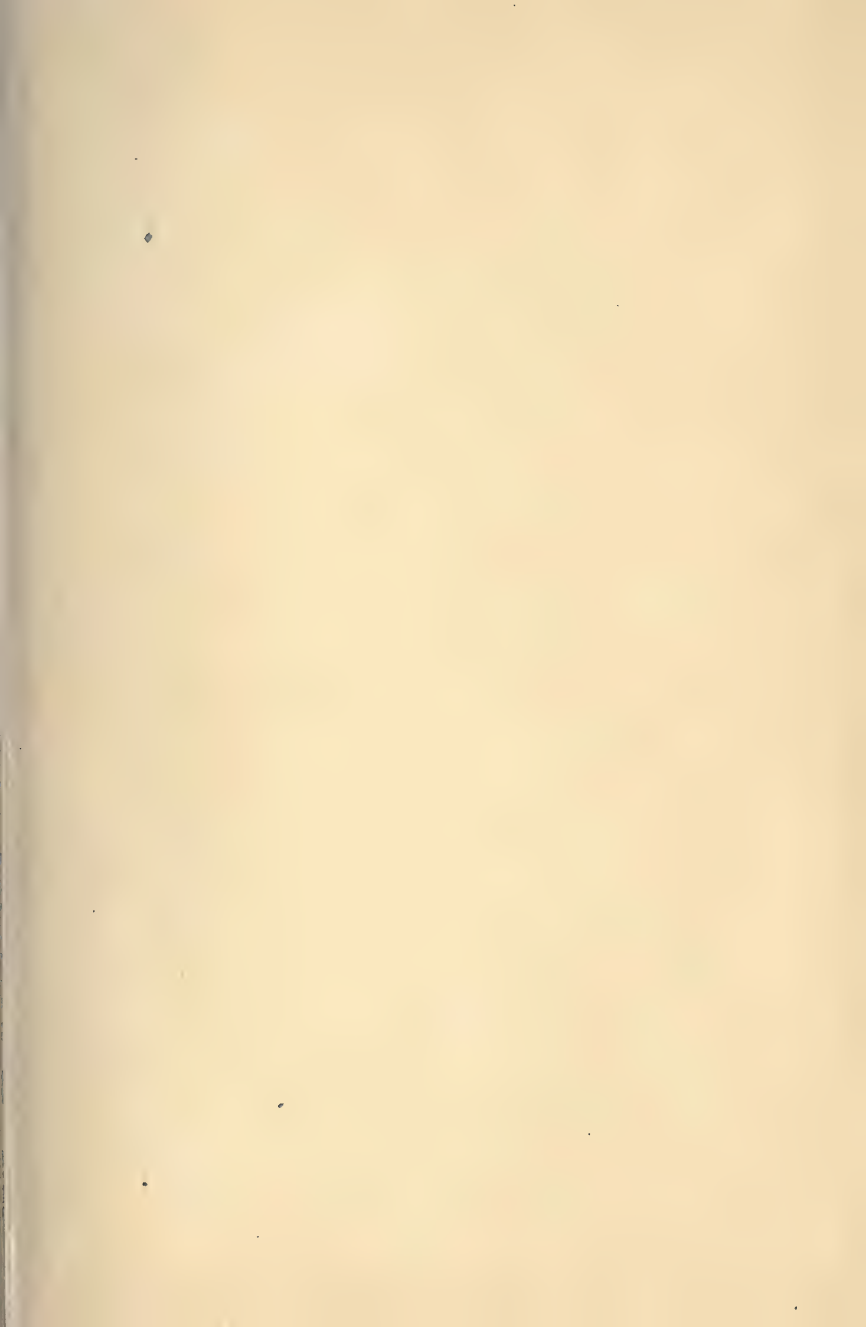
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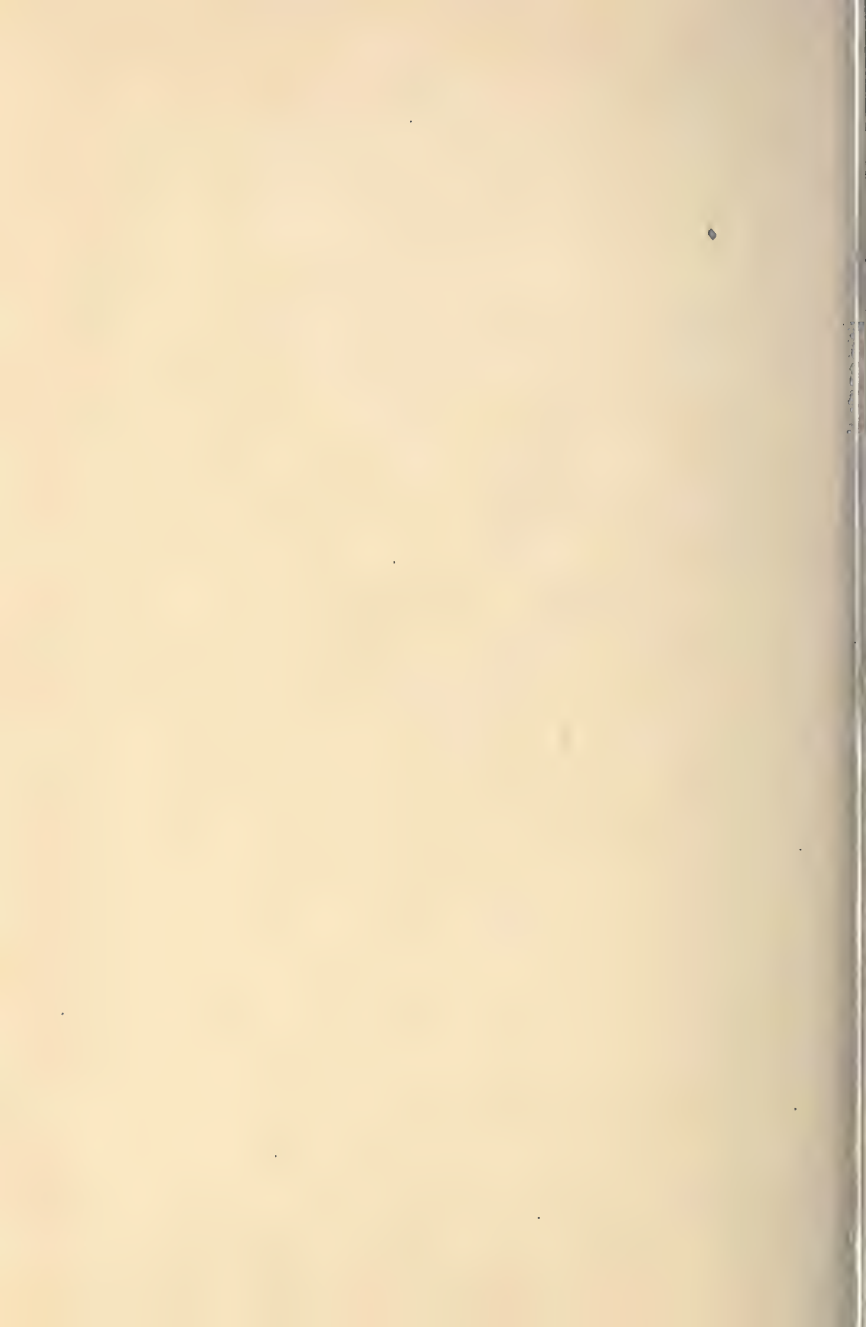


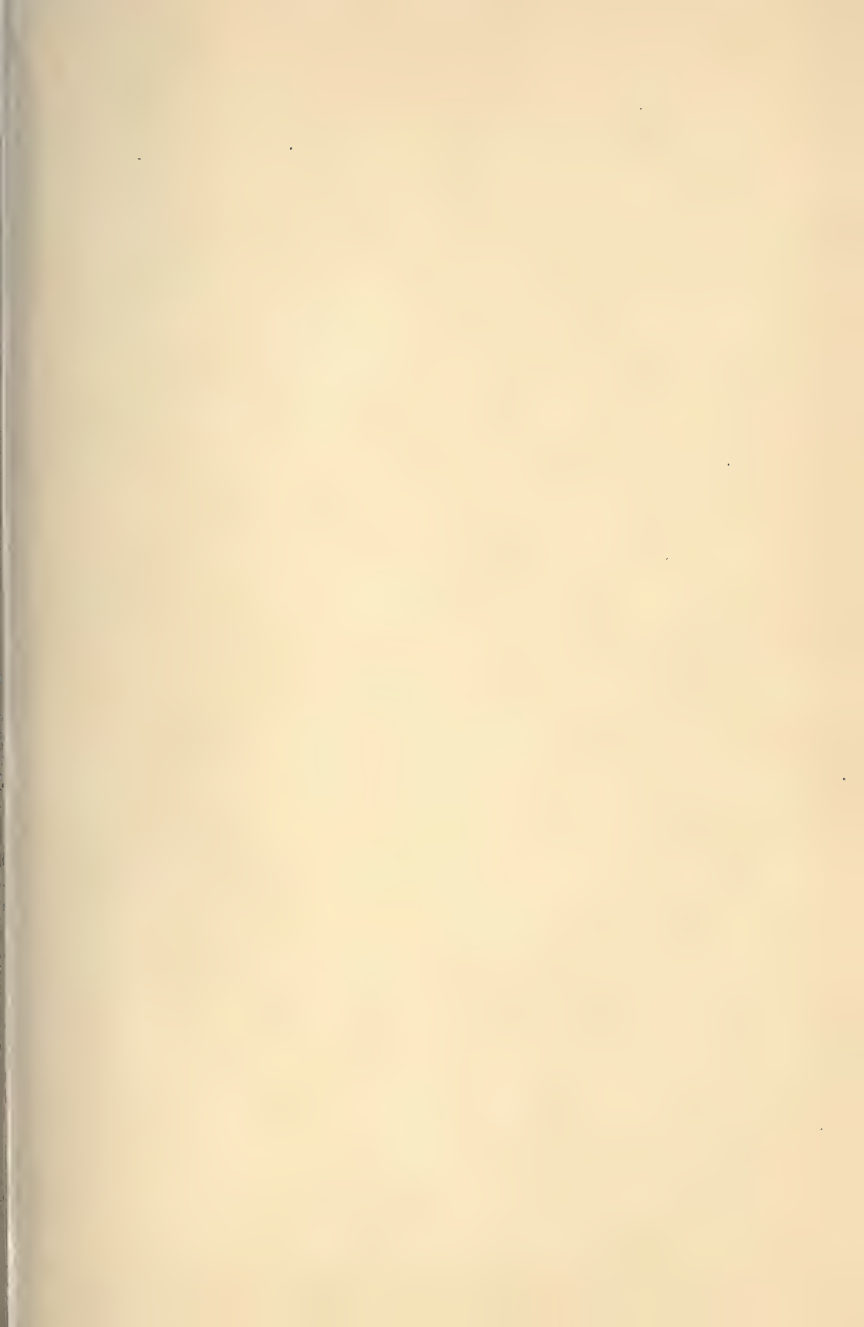


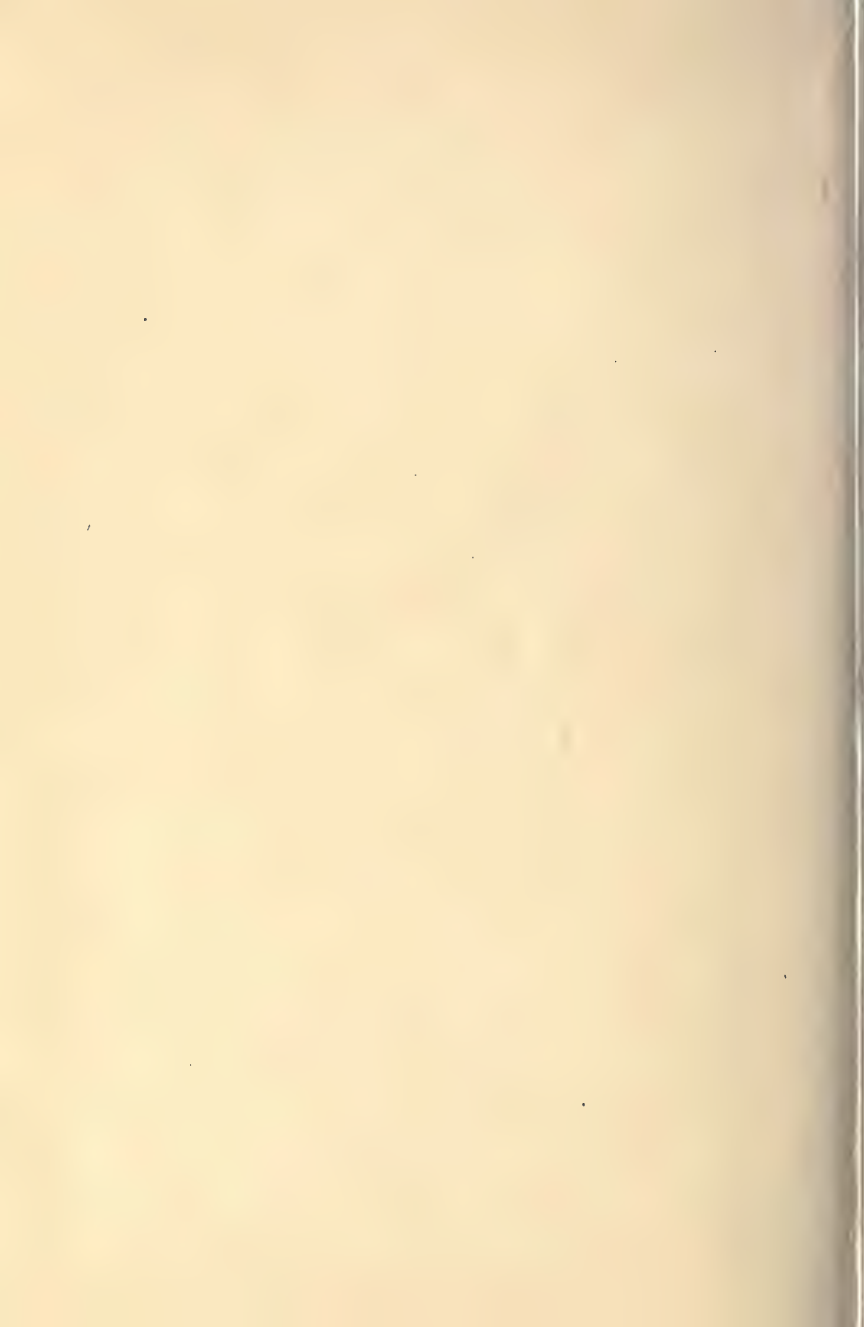


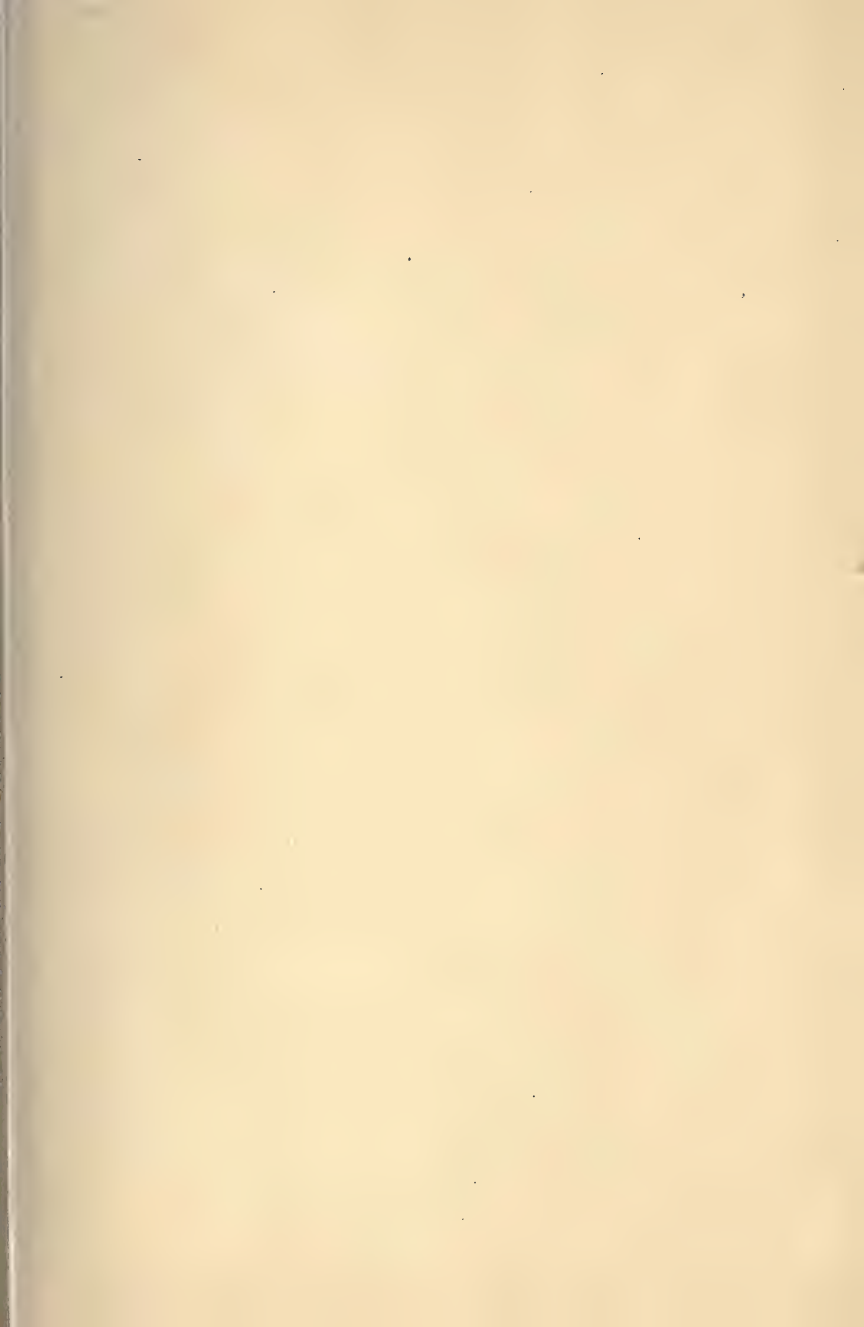


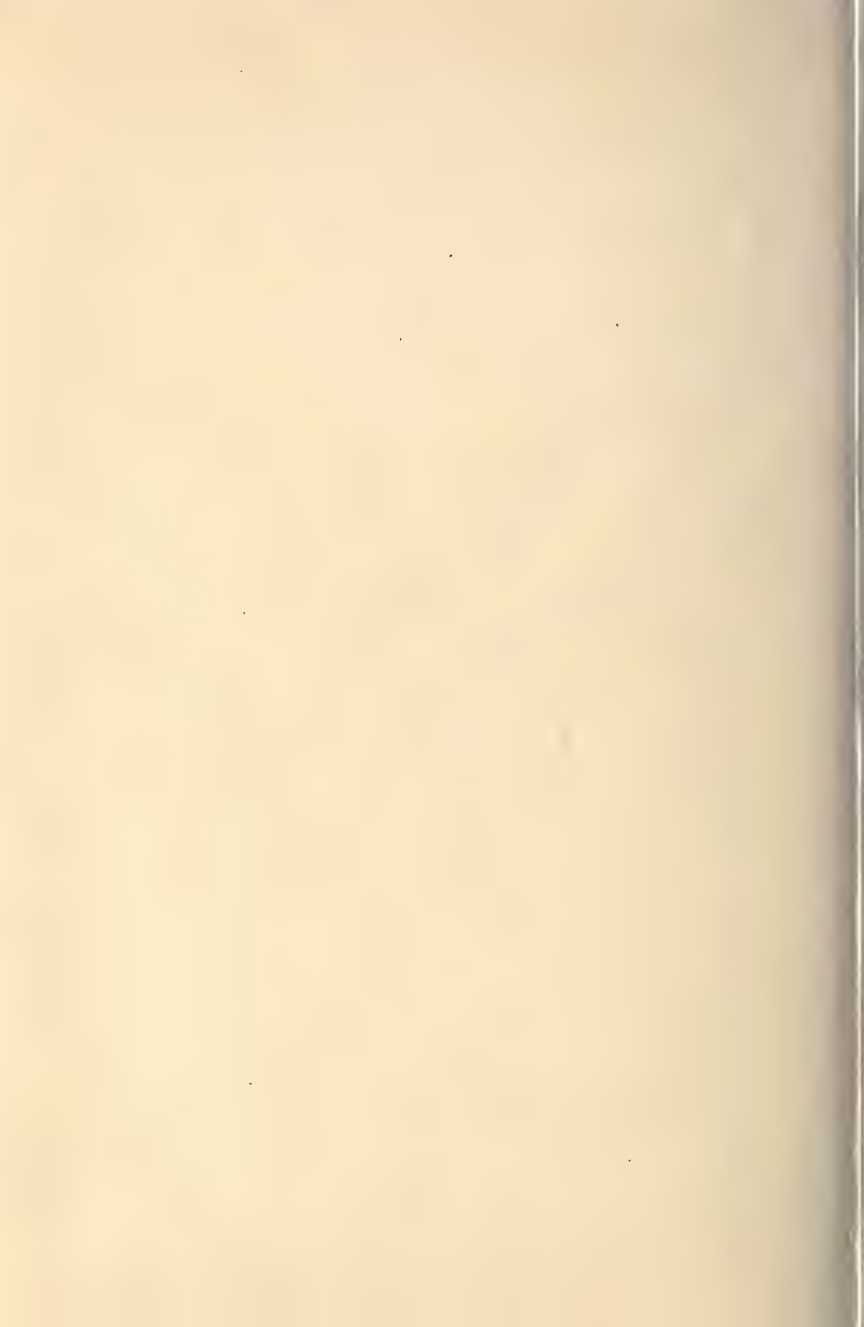




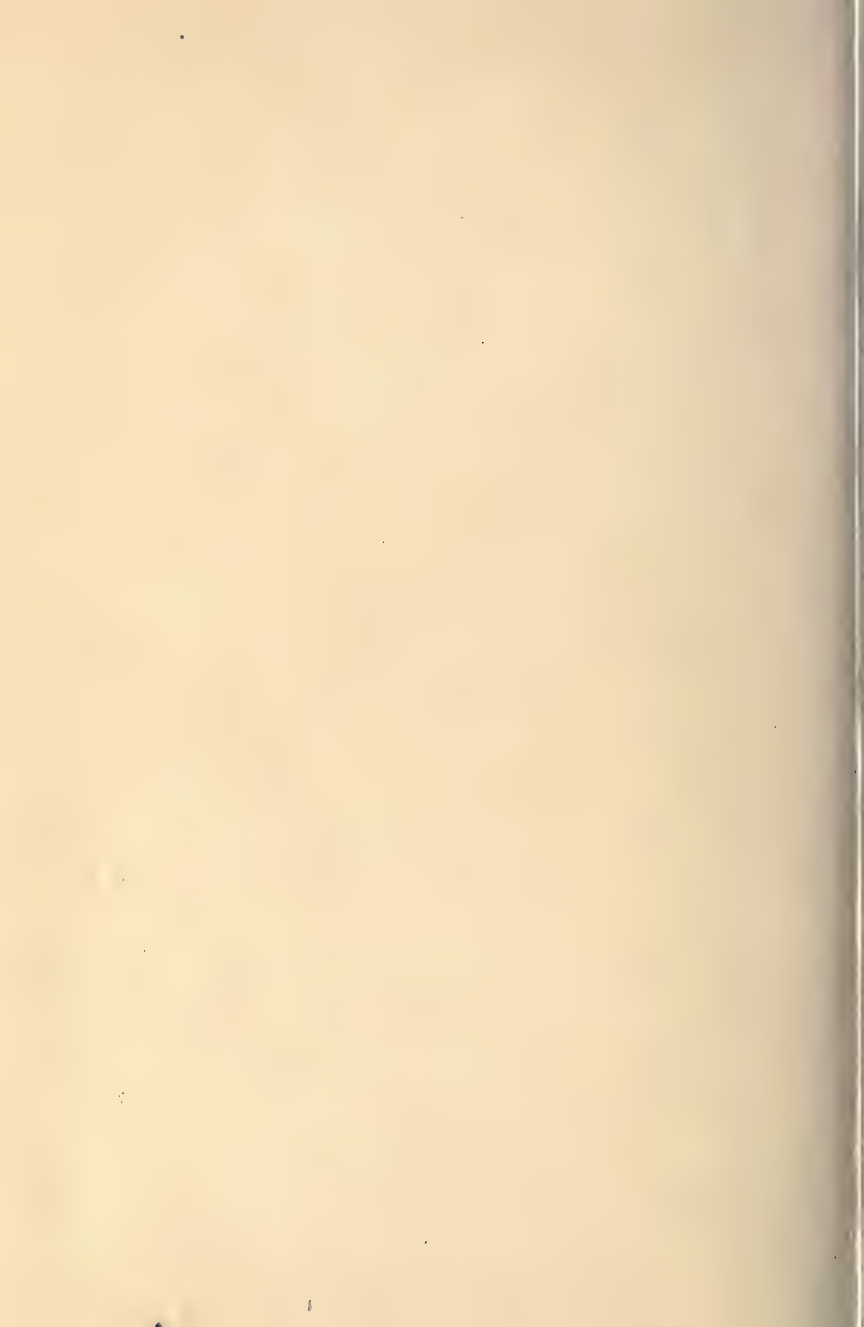


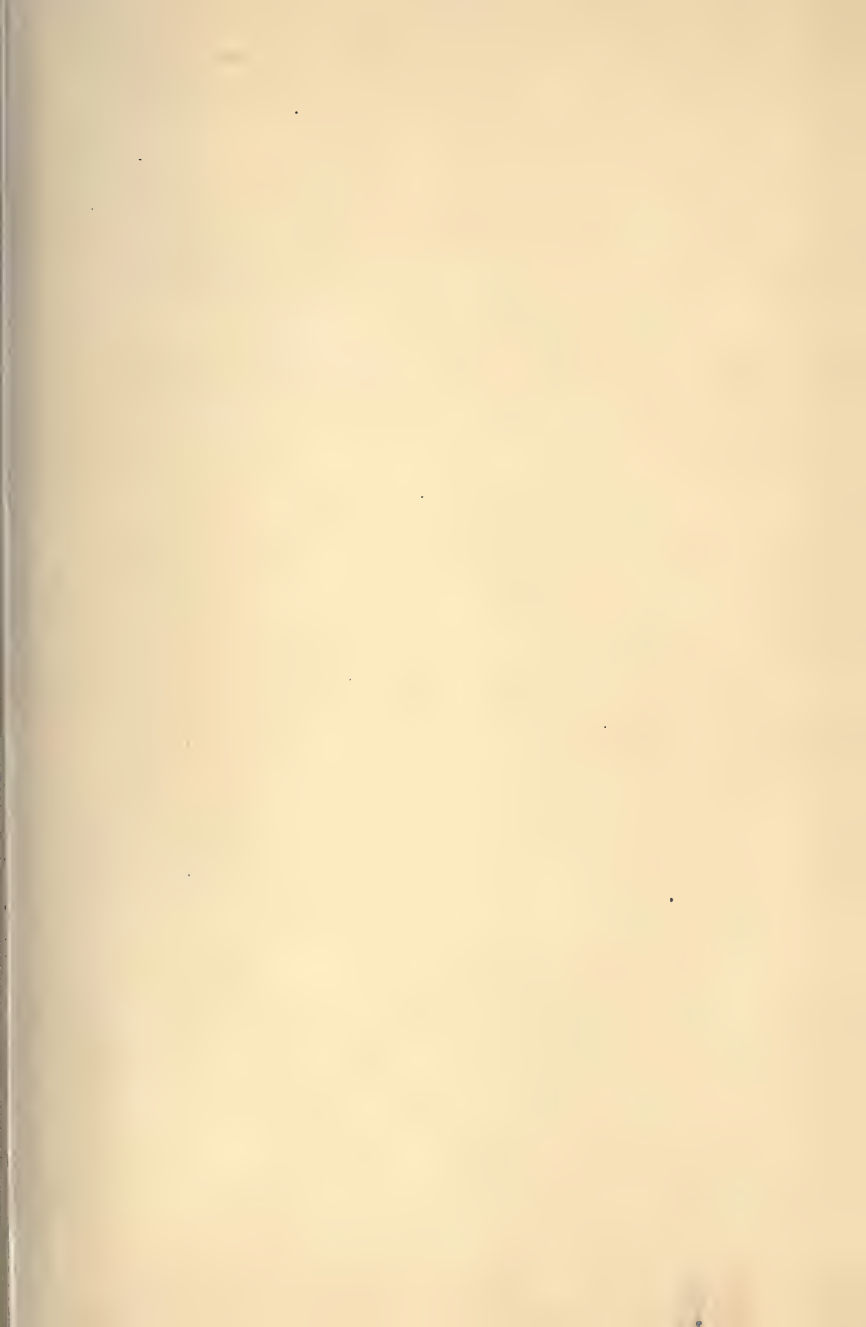


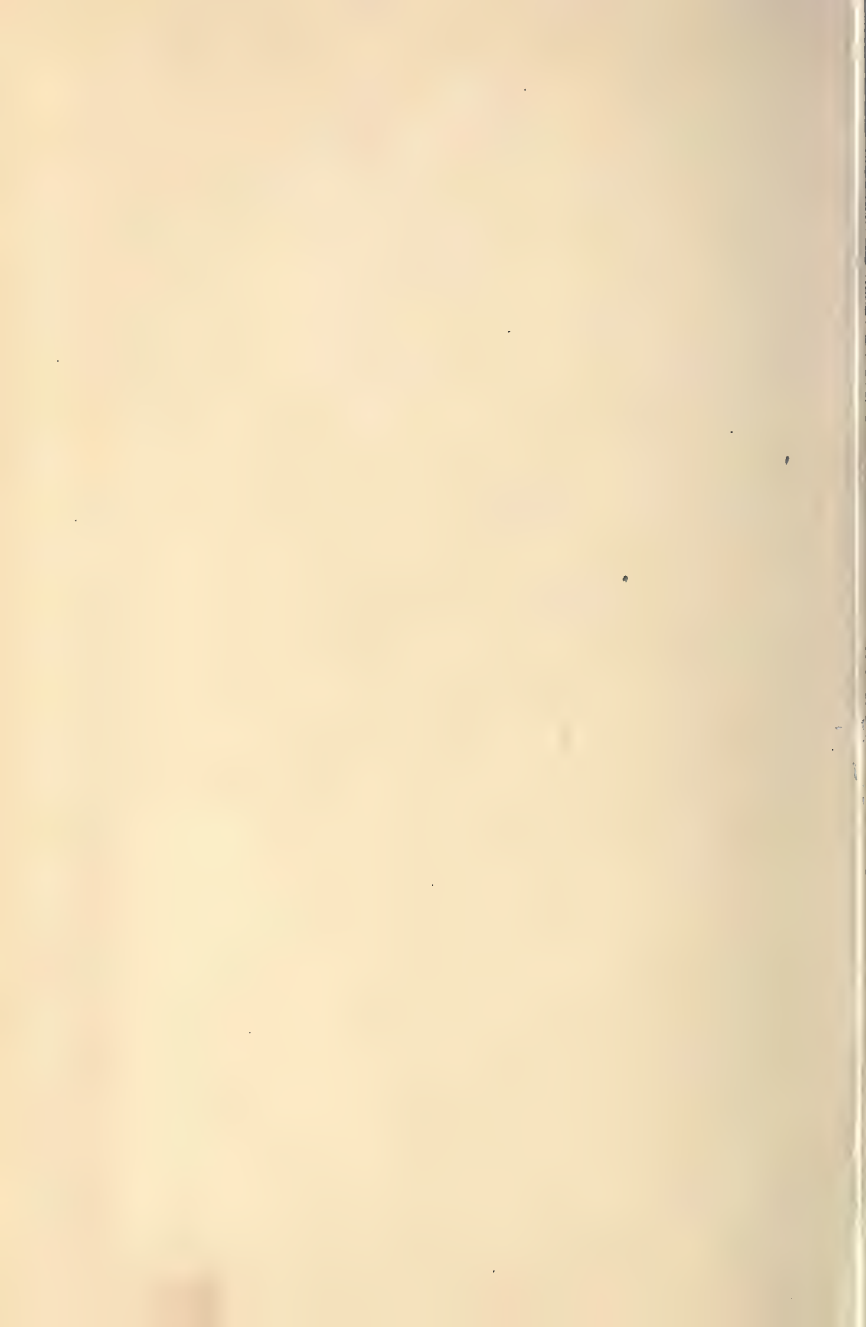


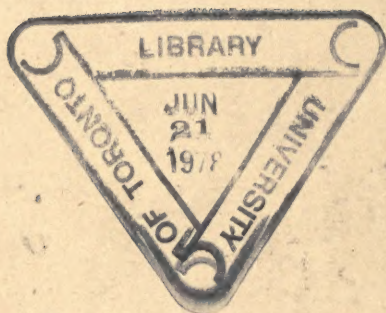












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